

# Volusia Remembers Coalition Newsletter



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**MISSION: Remember, acknowledge, and reflect upon our history of racial terror by partnering with the Equal Justice Initiative to install monuments to victims of lynching in Volusia County.**

## VRC will continue to build on the momentum ....



The first Soil Collection Ceremony, honoring the humanity of Lee Snell, WWI veteran and Daytona Beach Black businessman, lynched on April 29 in 1939 was a great success. We are continuing to hear positive feedback! The soil collection committee is in the process of planning the next Soil Collection ceremonies.

VCR continues to foster conversations about the “hard history” and legacies of racial terror in our county. We are also working on how to best connect what we have learned and experienced about our country’s past, and our county’s, with initiatives today to promote justice, healing of historical traumas, and reconciliation in our beloved Volusia County.



Several coalition members have suggestions for a deeper study of the issues we are dealing with—including racial terror lynching (historical and contemporary), recently proposed or enacted voting restrictions (Jim Crow renewed, for some people), and mass incarceration and other inequities in the criminal justice system. We believe that our remembrance work can ground us in understandings of the past that will prepare us to address racism and its evils in the present.

## ZOOM CONVERSATION WITH EJI

Equal Justice Initiative colleagues, Trey Walk and Gabrielle Daniels spoke with the Steering Committee



EJI was very complimentary of the Lee Snell Soil Ceremony; they especially liked our pairing creative elements, music, poetry, and dance (a big thanks to Sharon for Snell’s story in the program and to Terrance Lane, Carla Lester, Jalen Blair, and Rajni Shankar-Brown!), alongside the factual information (*thanks Rick Buckelew and Felicia Benzo*) about the life of Mr. Snell, his murder and the trial that resulted in the acquittal of the White men who murdered him, and the vigorous response by the local community, national organizations, calling for justice. EJI colleagues agreed with us that the remarks of the politicians...such as the Seventh Circuit Chief Judge, Raul A. Zambrano; Circuit Judge, Joan Anthony and retired Circuit Judge, Hubert Grimes; Volusia County Sheriff, Michael Chitwood; Volusia County Council member,

Barb Girtman; Daytona Beach City Commission member, Paula Reed were very touching and important. EJI noted that the use of the Chat function, hosted by Evan Keller and Sam Houston, was a very creative and different approach to engage the viewers. They stated they would share this idea with other community groups. It was suggested we consider creating small break out discussion sessions for use in the future soil collection events. The soil collection committee will discuss the idea. The plans are for the ceremonies to not last more than an hour.

## POSITIVE COMMENTS

Daisy Grimes reported that she has heard nothing but positive comments about the Lee Snell Ceremony. After the ceremony Chief Judge Zambrano shared with her how hurtful it was for him to recognize the justice system's complicity in the events surrounding Mr. Snell's death. She also complimented Volusia County Sheriff Chitwood who shared impressive words at the ceremony about the responsibility he felt, as a former leader of the Daytona Beach police department and now as Volusia County Sheriff. He later requested a private tour to pay his respects at Mr. Snell's gravesite.

Grady Ballenger also reported that the attendees through the Zen Peacemakers, International event, coordinated by Geoff O'Keeffe, ZPI staff, and Morris Sullivan, Stetson University Chaplain, were greatly moved as well.



*Daisy Grimes and Reginald Williams*



## SHOUT OUT TO...

Sam Houston and his Stetson colleague Chaz Underriner, and professional services supplied by Lindsay Carelli and Stetson's Chaplain's Office, a video of the event can now be accessed on our website and through our Facebook page. We also expressed special thanks to the print and TV journalists who covered the event, including Eli Witek (*West Volusia Beacon*), Duane Fernandez (*Daytona Times*) and Lady La Joseph (La La Production).

Thanks to Daisy Grimes, Soil Collection Chair and her committee, Sharon Stafford, Co-chair, for their energetic leadership of the event.

They in turn reached out to thank VRC members and everyone who contributed so much of their time and energy to the event.

Remember we work as a TEAM = Together Everyone Accomplishes More!!!



## "LYNCHING" VICTIM HERBERT BROOKS REASSIGNED

The EJI colleagues informed us that the remembrance for Herbert Brooks (1920) has been reassigned to a community remembrance organization in Miami-Dade, where he, a British subject from the Bahamas, lived, was arrested with little evidence, and transported north in police custody to avoid a White mob.

Mr. Brooks' death was reported as happening on the train tracks north of Daytona Beach, as he was being returned, in custody, for trial in Miami. There are reasons to believe, however, that he was murdered elsewhere. Nevertheless, the coalition has agreed to recognize him here, in an appropriate way, at the reported site of his "suicide" by leaping from the train. We will also seek connection with the Miami-Dade remembrance effort.

EJI states the historical markers and Volusia County monument will be corrected with these changes (Mr. Snell will be listed on the original list for Volusia County at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and Mr. Brooks' name will be removed, for a total of four documented victims in the period from 1891 to 1939). We understand that these four documented lynchings represent others that have not been fully documented, as well as others that will never be known, and still others that were threatened in order to terrorize Blacks and People of Color in our county.



**April 7, 2021**

The meeting with the Steering committee and full Coalition was chaired by Sharon Stafford. Treasurer Tom Robertson reported on VCR finances. We are thankful and appreciate the generous donors. We expect bigger costs are ahead, and we must continue to develop funding for the installation of the historical markers and a replica of the Volusia County memorial at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. We do understand that the EJI will pay for the creation and shipping of these markers and memorial, however, we are responsible for the installation expenses and programming which are inspired by these monuments. The monuments are intended to increase understandings of our racial past and to build a vision for our united future.

Special thanks to Judy Thompson for her dedication, her awesome notes and summary of our conversations with EJI and in Coalition Steering and Plenary meetings on April 7...Judy you are awesome!



### **PLANS TO HONOR LEE BAILEY**

The Soil Collection Committee is planning on honoring Lee Bailey next. Three victims from the 1890s have been documented by EJI. The Soil Collection Committee recommends that our next ceremony honor Lee Bailey, our earliest known victim, reported to have been forcefully removed from the DeLand jail and lynched by a White mob in the 200 block of Rich Avenue in DeLand in 1891. The site is only a few blocks from the Historic County Courthouse in DeLand and is in the vicinity of the formerly all-White DeLand High School, which is now an administrative building for Volusia County Schools. Local historian Sidney Johnston has gathered documentation from newspapers of that time and from city maps and directories. EJI is also preparing a narrative for these lynching victims. The Soil Collection Committee will make a site visit to determine how best the ceremony might be staged—outside, near the Volusia County School System’s administrative building, or perhaps in the Historic Courthouse. It was suggested that we might include a walk during the event, possibly to the Courthouse or to the Thin Man Watts Amphitheatre at the African American Museum of the Arts. Possible dates were discussed, including May 20 (*Florida’s Emancipation Day*) or Juneteenth, but the Committee believes August would be a better fit, when colleges and schools are back in session. We don’t know much about Mr. Bailey’s life at this point, so we’ll hope to develop an understanding of Black life and of agricultural and domestic work in this Jim Crow period in our county. (All three of the victims from the 1890s were household or agricultural workers; all three were accused of assaults on a White woman or girl; and all three were abducted from police custody by a White mob. Finally, all three were “spectacle” lynchings, with bodies left on display to terrorize the Black community, and no one was brought to justice for these murders.

**Daisy requested that anyone with ideas or historical information, or an interest in volunteering, please contact her at [dcurr548@aol.com](mailto:dcurr548@aol.com).**





## OUR COMMITMENT

VRC continues to reflect on the individual commitments to this project, to our individual “whys,” and to connect our Remembrance Work to remaining challenges: Sam and Evan have suggested that we gather in small in-person or virtual groups to share why we have decided to be a part of the VRC. The process is intended to build community and inform our vision going forward. Sam reported that he has taught a class using the 2019 HBO film on Bryan Stevenson’s career, *True Justice*, to illuminate what truth and reconciliation look like. “Hard history” must precede justice and reconciliation. When COVID precautions allow, we’ll seek to host discussions like these.

Daisy noted that the VCR efforts are encouraging, but the Black community fears that our country is going backward –that grandchildren will have to relive “Jim Crow.” Sharon commented that young people do not have a sense of how the past was very different from what they experience today. Jordan McCormick, a Stetson senior, noted that young people have to actively seek out information about racism. It is not taught in our schools as it should be. With the social media focus on the former President and his White Supremacist supporters, and the murder of George Floyd and Brionna Taylor and the dozens of other People of Color who have been recent victims of police brutality, more young people are becoming involved in combating racism. The question is: will anything change or is this concern merely a “performance”? How should VRC, in collaboration with other groups, address specific policies or structures of racial injustice today?

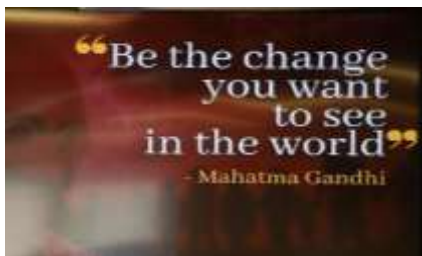
### Some of our efforts connect remembrance work to advocacy for justice and anti-racism today.

Daisy asked that everyone write to our Florida delegation members to encourage them NOT to enact voter suppression measures. Daisy also announced an April 14 forum on voter suppression and ways to advocate for supporting full access to the right to vote. She will provide information on how to join.

**Please contact her at [dcurr548@aol.com](mailto:dcurr548@aol.com).**

Jordan McCormick will be graduating and going to Vanderbilt for graduate work. Before she leaves, she will work with Daisy Grimes to connect students from BCU and Stetson in student-to-student conversations and perhaps joint projects in the fall.

Sara Riley noted that Flagler activists have formed a community organization, “Showing Up for Racial Justice.” She hopes we can collaborate with them in addressing injustice that results from anti-Black racism.



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### VOLUSIA REMEMBERS COALITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Sharon Stafford, Co-Chair  
Dr. Grady Ballenger, Co-Chair  
Judy Thompson, Secretary/CIVITAS Rep  
Daisy Grimes, Soil Collection Chair  
Felicia Benzo, Education Chair  
Dr. Sam Houston, Social Media Chair  
Evan Keller, Public Relations/Communication Chair  
Tom Robertson, Finance  
Reginald Williams, Finance  
Rina Tovar Arroyo, Fundraiser  
Mary Allen, Community Historian  
Dr. Richard Buckelew, Professional Historian  
Dr. Andy A. Eisen, Professional Historian  
Bobbie Baugh, Web Designer

## OTHER OPPORTUNITIES....

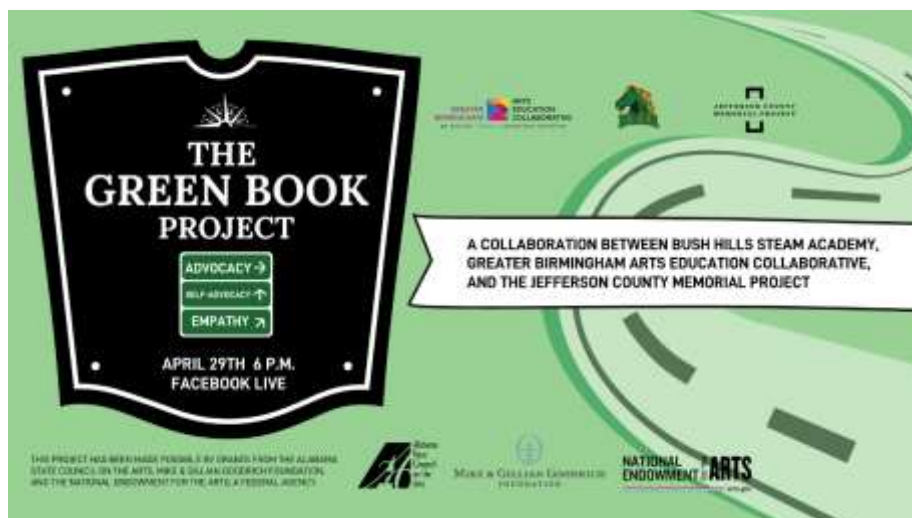
Several members suggested **other opportunities to develop our understandings and to join our efforts for justice, repair of the legacy of slavery, and reconciliation.**

Jody Williams ([jdgwms@att.net](mailto:jdgwms@att.net)) alerts us to several opportunities being offered by the **West Volusia Historical Society**. [See Announcements at the end of this newsletter.] Through their webpage, <https://www.delandhouse.com>, you can register for a **talk by historian Len Lempel**, listen to **an interview with Gilbert King** (author of *Devil in the Grove* and *Richard Graham*, Ormond Beach attorney), and sign up for walking tours of Black historical sites in DeLand and Daytona Beach. Lempel's talk is next Tuesday, April 20, at 7 pm. Register through the website or directly by email to Linda Barnett [lfgbarnett@gmail.com](mailto:lfgbarnett@gmail.com)

Jody adds that she had "the pleasure of being there in person [for King's talk about *Devil in the Grove*.] That old DeLand courthouse means more to us all now, given our interest and awareness of the lynchings." She adds that King's more recent *Beneath a Ruthless Sun* "reprises and in a twisted awful way connects to the racial injustices recounted there [in Lake County], but adding the inhumane and extralegal "treatment" of a presumed retarded White boy accused of rape, then locked up for decades." In this case, the White boy was seen as a more acceptable substitute for a Black man who was accused of assault on a White woman. How curious and harsh anti-Black racism is!

Judy Thompson recommends we visit the webpage of a community organization in Birmingham Alabama, the Jefferson County Memorial Project. [jeffersoncountymemorial.com](http://jeffersoncountymemorial.com) is the website address. Note that all event times on the site are Central (one hour later.)

There you'll find an announcement of a **powerful art display: "Just Injust"** featuring work by **formerly incarcerated artist Ronald McKeithen and a virtual conversation, on April 16<sup>th</sup>, at noon that day, on art and racial injustice.**



**This is another of their projects, inspired by the famous Green Book for Black travelers. It is a showcase of Virtual Art and Poetry drawing on local and national grant support and the creativity of local schoolchildren:** In a collaborative project between Greater Birmingham Arts Education Collaborative (GBAEC), Bush Hills STEAM Academy and JCMP, sixth-grade students at Bush Hills STEAM Academy have created original artwork and poetry centered around the Green Book. With the help of teaching artist Jahman Hill, students created book covers and poems while focusing on tenets of advocacy, empathy and self-advocacy. In celebration of the students' work, JCMP and GBAEC will host a live-streaming event on Thursday, April 29 at 6 p.m. Following the event, the students' work will be available for viewing on the JCMP website.

**And finally a series similar to our planned conversations about our "why's"):** "My Story" Speaker Series Episode One, on May 20<sup>th</sup>. Join us on May 20th at 6 p.m. as we present the first installment of our "My Story" Speaker Series. Featuring JCMP's Executive Director Joi Brown, Core Coalition members T. Marie King and Myeisha Hutchinson and fellow Leo Proctor, the first episode in the series focuses on dealing with the difficult history of lynching as well as one's own family history as it relates to lynching. More information will be available on JCMP's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages as the event approaches.

Evan Keller offers a quotation from EJI's founder, Bryan Stevenson:

Written long before the current voting rights crisis, a provocative quotation from Byran Stevenson. (Quoted by Brenda Salter-McNeil in *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0*, a book being discussed on April 24 by the local community group, Beloved:

"...Real reparations would be to fix what was actually broken. For example, black people in this country were denied the right to vote. White people brutalized, terrorized, and killed black people for trying to vote over a century. So, to repair that, white Americans would automatically give all African Americans the right to vote on their eighteenth birthday! . . . if you're an elderly African American, we would pick you up and drive you to the polls to vote! Now *that* would actually repair what was really broken!"

And for those of you **connecting our remembrance work to the death of George Floyd**, Grady recommends Charles Blow's powerful series of short pieces for the *New York Times* editorial page. This is from his column on George Floyd and the long history of racial lynching:

My point is that there are echoes in Floyd's killing, in public, in front of his community, in broad daylight, that reverberate from centuries of killings of men and women who look like Floyd, whose killings the system of the time validated or shielded.

It is hard not to draw the through-line from a noose on the neck to a knee on the neck. And it is also hard not to recall that few people were ever punished for lynchings.

Blow's piece originally appeared in the New York Times. If you can't access it there, here's a reprint (no pay wall but lots of ads!) from the Austin TX *Statesman*:

<https://www.statesman.com/story/opinion/columns/more-voices/2021/04/07/echoes-reverberating-george-floyds-killing/7107213002/>

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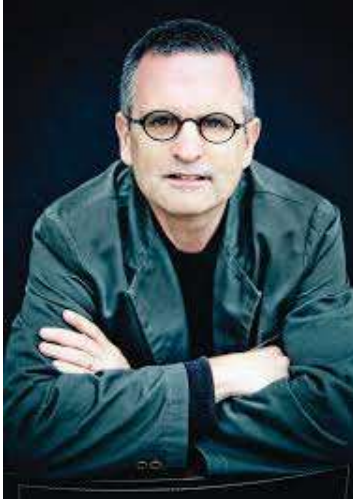
## Keeping Track of West Volusia History

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### Local History Talk Virtual Tour - Daytona Beach Black Heritage Trail Tuesday, April 20, 2021 7 pm - on Zoom

Historian Dr. Len Lempel leads a virtual tour of sites highlighted in the tour booklet he edited. The sites along this trail, inspired by the late Daytona Beach City Commissioner and Mayor, Yvonne Scarlett-Golden, illustrate the many aspects of Daytona's Black Heritage and honors a number of the many African Americans who have made significant contributions to the city's heritage and history. This tour is available virtually on Zoom. Tuesday April 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm. If you would like to attend, request the link by simply sending an email to WVHS marketing outreach [at this address.](#)

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### **"A Conversation with Gilbert King and Richard Graham"**

explores the true story of a crime committed in 1957 in Lake County, Florida. King is the author of **Beneath A Ruthless Sun** published in 2018. The book tells a powerful story about the rape of the wife of a citrus baron, a sheriff without remorse, a mentally handicapped juvenile, a journalist who risked her own life to seek the truth, and a young attorney who took a case that no one else had dared to pursue.

### **[View the video here of the intriguing conversation](#)**

recorded in August 2018 at the Volusia County Historic Courthouse in DeLand, FL and produced by CineRover in cooperation with the West Volusia Historical Society.

This documentary joins a filmed interview, "An Evening with Gilbert King and Richard Graham" also available on the West Volusia Historical Society's **[You Tube Channel](#)**.