



For Immediate Release
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Reparative Justice Coalition of St. Louis Francis McIntosh Soil Collection Ceremony

Saint Louis, MO – On Saturday, April 30, 2022 at 9:00am, in partnership with the Community Remembrance Project of the Equal Justice Initiative, RJCSTL will hold a Soil Collection Ceremony commemorating the April 28, 1836 lynching of Mr. Francis McIntosh, a free Black man who was abducted by a white mob from the Saint Louis jail at 6th & Chestnut, chained to a tree a block away at 7th & Chestnut, and burned alive. No one was held responsible. The burned tree was left as a monument to racial terror.

The Lynching of Francis McIntosh

Francis McIntosh was a free Black man who was lynched by a mob in 1836. The case is well-documented, in part for its incredible brutality. McIntosh was briefly jailed following a violent encounter with two St. Louis police that left one of them mortally wounded. A white mob abducted McIntosh from the jail, tied him to a nearby tree, and burned him alive as a crowd looked on. Historian Walter Johnson writes in *The Broken Heart of America* (2020, p. 77), “the burned tree [was] left standing on the corner of Seventh and Chestnut for years afterward, an attraction for whites traveling west and a grim warning for Blacks passing by,” illustrating one of the ways the lynching would continue to haunt the region, perpetuating racial terror, and corrupting the rule of law.

The denial of justice

The infamy of the McIntosh lynching relates to the brutality of the mob as well as a number of subsequent events. These include the killing of white abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy - whose condemnation of the lynching and subsequent miscarriage of justice enraged pro-slavery elements in St. Louis and Southern Illinois - and both mob killings being condemned in a speech by Abraham Lincoln. In his 1838 “Lyceum Address,” Lincoln warned that the institution of slavery and impunity for racist violence degraded the rule of law and legitimacy of the state, using the McIntosh lynching and the related assassination of Lovejoy as primary cases in point.

Key to our decision to commemorate this case is the **denial of justice** in the perpetration of lynching and the impunity of the mob. McIntosh was denied the presumption of innocence and other elements of due process and equal protection under law, and the mob went unpunished. Several participants in the McIntosh lynching were subject to a grand jury hearing over whether they should be indicted. The presiding judge named Luke Lawless, true to name, urged grand jurors to vindicate the mob. Judge Lawless warned a conviction would encourage abolitionists (whom he called “antislavery fanatics”). He sought to exculpate the mob with the excuse that members were “impelled by that mysterious, metaphysical, and almost electric phrenzy [sic]...beyond the reach of human law,” and therefore not criminally responsible. It worked - no one was punished for this murder. Elijah Lovejoy, outraged by this injustice, intensified his abolitionist work, for which constitutionally protected speech he was driven from St. Louis and later killed by a pro-slavery mob in Alton, Illinois, just across the Mississippi River.

The McIntosh lynching and impunity of the mob legitimized anti-Black violence and denials of equal protection in ways that were clear in the immediate aftermath and remain still today. The coalition recently learned of a reported lynching two years later (1838) aboard a riverboat, after which a principal suspect - who had been detained when the boat docked in St. Louis - was released on grounds the McIntosh case established that white mob violence was not punishable by law. Noting the taste for violent punishment of Black transgressions, in 1841 entrepreneurs chartered the steamboat Eagle and sold tickets to Alton and St. Louis-based passengers wanting a closeup view of the hanging of four Black men on Duncan Island, just south of St. Louis. The echoes would continue, in St. Louis, the region, and nationwide.

The Soil Collection Project of the Equal Justice Initiative

EJI has joined with communities across the nation to collect soil from every lynching site as an act of remembrance and commitment to honoring the victims of this horrific era of terror. EJI's soil collection project is intended to provide opportunities for community members to get closer to the legacy of lynching and to contribute to the effort to build a lasting and more visible memory of our history of racial injustice. These jars of collected soil are on exhibit in the new Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, as well as in other exhibit spaces, to reflect the history of lynching and our generation's resolve to confront the continuing challenges that racial inequality creates.

While collecting soil from the site of a lynching is a simple gesture, EJI and its community partners believe it is an important act of remembrance that can begin a process of recovery and reconciliation to our history of lynching and terror. The named containers with collected soil that we create become important pieces of our broken and terrifying past. We believe these jars represent the hope of community members who seek racial justice and a greater commitment to the rule of law and human rights.

Please join us as Mayor Tishaura Jones, faith leaders, advocates, and other community members unite to commemorate the historic injustice suffered by Mr. Francis McIntosh and determine to further the effort to educate and acknowledge the legacies of racial violence in order to advance equity in our community.

The Soil Collection Ceremony begins at 9:00am, Saturday April 30, 2022, in the NW corner of Kiener Plaza. Following remarks by St. Louis Community Remembrance Project contributors and invited guests, we will fill three jars with soil collected from the area of 7th and Chestnut. One jar will become part of a Griot Museum exhibit, another will be sent to the Black Archives of Mid-America for its exhibit (on Community Remembrance Projects across Missouri), and the third jar will be shipped to EJI to become part of its national memorial. For more about the lynching of McIntosh and the St. Louis Community Remembrance project visit: <https://www.rjcostl.org/st-louis-crp>.

The Reparative Justice Coalition of St. Louis (RJCSL) is a network of volunteers committed to addressing our city's histories and legacies of racial violence. With partners across the region, state and nation, RJCSL pursues and supports projects acknowledging this historical trauma and supporting redress, in pursuit of transformative justice.

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