

# Community mourns William Taylor, city's lynching victim

By ANDY OURIEL, Sandusky Register 11/11/2019



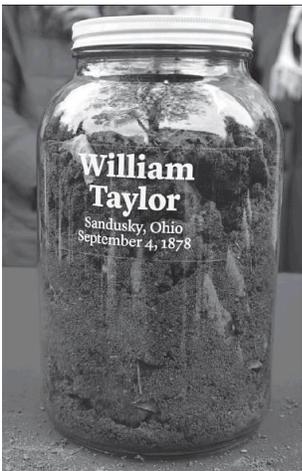
Register photo/ANDY OURIEL

After digging dirt from a nearby tree (background), Sandusky resident Dan Leavell drops soil into a jar during Saturday's Sandusky Soil Collection Community Project.



About 100 community members attended the Sandusky Soil Collection Community Project in

downtown Sandusky on Saturday. The event remembered William Taylor, who died from a lynching incident in 1878. Attendees recreated the walk in which, 141 years ago, an angry mob dragged a beaten Taylor to his hanging site: Columbus Avenue and Market Street.



Attendees filled two jars with soil where a mob lynched William Taylor on Sept. 4, 1878. The jars will be taken to the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, where they'll go on display.

## SANDUSKY

The long-overdue ceremony remembering William Taylor's horrific death finally occurred 141 years later. But Saturday's event, known as the Sandusky Soil Collection Community Project, also helped strengthened his legacy in hopes of, going forward, better educating community members to end racial clashes and senseless violence.

Several groups — the Sandusky NAACP, the city's community relations commission, the Erie County Historical Society, the Equal Justice Initiative and the Mahoning Valley Sojourn to the Past — took part in the function, attended by about 100 people, to recall and reflect upon Taylor's fatal assault.

"On Sept. 4, 1878, a large, violent, white mob lynched a black man, named William Taylor, in downtown Sandusky," local NAACP president Daryl Murphy said. It's the only known lynching recorded in Sandusky's 201-year history. "They beat him mercilessly as they dragged him more than a mile and hanged him at a nearby lamppost."

The attendees walked in silence from Washington Park's gazebo — an area approximately where the mob attacked and began dragging Taylor — to Columbus Avenue and Market Street. That's where Taylor's hanging, and execution, happened.

"Like nearly all documented lynching victims, Mr. Taylor never had a chance to stand trial for the crime he was alleged of committing," Murphy said. "He was killed by a mob that never faced prosecution for the lynching. The failure to hold the lynch mob accountable shielded

them from legal and social consequences, which only served to reinforce the racial terrorism of this era.”

At Taylor’s death site, where a tree stands today, attendees scooped dirt near its stump. They then dropped the soil into two empty jars, both featuring Taylor’s name; his hometown, of Sandusky; and when he died. “That showed buy-in from the entire community,” Murphy said. “When you have people from all different walks and parts of our community come together for something so important, it can truly begin the healing process.”

Members representing the Community Remembrance Project of the Equal Justice Initiative, which operates the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, now possess these jars. They’ll bring them to the museum, where they’ve collected soil from other lynching sites all across the U.S., and put them on display.

Sandusky city commissioner Naomi Twine believes people can learn a valuable lesson from Taylor’s death and apply it to modern-day life. “The hatred, the violence and the vengeance that was exhibited 141 years ago on a black man ... we are still seeing some of those same things today,” Twine said. “We have to reflect. We have to remember. We have to stop the hatred and remember that we are all human beings. We all have a right to freedom and to live our lives.”

Some people asked Daniel Williams, an event speaker who serves on the community relations commission, “Why now? Why should we remember William Taylor so long after the fact?” “In order to truly progress, we should share a common disdain for vigilantism and xenophobia,” Williams said. “Mr. Taylor was free, but he wasn’t free. I’m proud (that these organizations) are working together to transcend the attitude of American exceptionalism that has the tendency to sweep heinous acts under the rug and act as if it depicts America as superior to third-world countries that are less civilized.”

So what does Saturday’s event mean to Williams? “This soil collection, and a future marker detailing this lynching, is a step in the right direction,” he said. “It’s a genuine move toward reconciliation and bringing American history full circle. A real depiction of what happened can help us learn from it.”

John Hildebrandt, President of the Erie County Historical Society, spoke at the ceremony.

