

Legislation Text

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Proclaiming October 7, 2021, as William Still Day in the City of Philadelphia in honor of what would have been his 200th Birthday.

WHEREAS, William Still was born in New Jersey on October 7, 1821 to formerly enslaved parents; and

WHEREAS, In 1844 he moved to Philadelphia and was soon hired as a clerk at the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery. Later he served as the chair of the society's Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, which offered direct aid to fugitives from slavery; and

WHEREAS, William Still and his wife Letitia Still provided domestic comforts and care to hundreds of refugees, visitors, and long-term guests in their Philadelphia home, including Harriet Tubman; and

WHEREAS, Known nationally at the time as the "Father of the Underground Railroad," Still interviewed each person who escaped from slavery and kept records of their journeys. He turned these histories into his published book *The Underground Railroad* (1872), the most important contemporary source on the Railroad, which formed part of an exhibit at Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition in 1876; and

WHEREAS, Throughout his life, Still assisted hundreds of enslaved people liberate themselves, by serving as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, at great risk to himself; and

WHEREAS, Still was also central to the movement to desegregate Philadelphia's trolley system, which ultimately led to state laws in 1865 that did so across Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, He was an important businessman and philanthropist in Philadelphia: among many other projects, he established the first YMCA for African Americans in the City, which still stands on Christian Street; and

WHEREAS, His personal papers are now held at Temple University, and many of his descendants still live in the Philadelphia area; and

WHEREAS, October 7, 2021, marks the 200th Anniversary of the birth of this towering hero of American and Philadelphia history; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby proclaims October 7, 2021, as William Still Day in the City of Philadelphia in honor of what would have been his 200th Birthday.