City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
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Legislation Details (With Text)

File #:	160889	**Version:** 0	**Name:**		
Type:	Resolution		**Status:**	ADOPTED	
File created:	10/6/2016		**In control:**	CITY COUNCIL	
On agenda:			**Final action:**	10/6/2016	
Title:	Recognizing and honoring Philadelphia Mayor Joseph Watson for rescuing African American children who were kidnapped from Philadelphia.				
Sponsors:	Councilmember Oh, Councilmember Domb, Councilmember Jones, Councilmember Green, Councilmember Bass, Councilmember Taubenberger, Councilmember Parker, Councilmember Johnson, Councilmember Henon, Councilmember Squilla, Councilmember Reynolds Brown, Councilmember O'Neill, Councilmember Quiñones Sánchez, Councilmember Blackwell, Councilmember Gym				
Indexes:					
Code sections:					
Attachments:	1. Resolution No. 16088900.pdf				

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result	Tally
10/6/2016	0	CITY COUNCIL	Introduced and Ordered Placed on This Week's Final Passage Calendar	Pass	
10/6/2016	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		

Recognizing and honoring Philadelphia Mayor Joseph Watson for rescuing African American children who were kidnapped from Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Joseph Watson (1784-1841), a Quaker, first entered Philadelphia politics in the early 1820s. Watson served on the Common Council as an Alderman and then as Mayor from 1824-1827; and

WHEREAS, In the 1800s, Philadelphia had the largest free black population of any city in the North. African American children were the most vulnerable residents of Philadelphia, which was located just north of the Mason-Dixon Line and adjacent to the slave state of Delaware. Since Congress banned further importation of slaves into the U.S. in 1807, the demand for slaves to work in the cotton trade rose while the supply of slaves to work in the South declined. An increased demand for slave labor in the cotton trade coupled with Philadelphia's unique geographic and demographic characteristics made the City a prime target for kidnappers who would capture free African Americans in Philadelphia and then sell them at slave auctions; and

WHEREAS, During his tenure, Mayor Joseph Watson was contacted by plantation owners in Mississippi alerting him that suspicious slave traders were trying to sell young African Americans who claimed to be free and forcefully abducted from Philadelphia. Upon receiving this information, Watson took action by collecting affidavits from family, friends, and acquaintances of the kidnapping victims and working with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to prove the victims' free status; and

WHEREAS, Watson, along with his constable Samuel Garrigues, used money granted to him by Philadelphia City Council to investigate and apprehend the kidnappers. He found these crimes to be related to an extensive kidnapping ring operating on the Maryland-Delaware border, called the Cannon-Johnson gang. Mayor Joseph Watson personally secured the release of 10 kidnapping victims and helped to apprehend participants in the

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kidnapping ring that was preying on young, black Philadelphians; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Joseph Watson's correspondence and other written documents demonstrate that he displayed immense courage and extraordinary dedication to freeing kidnapped African Americans who had been taken from Philadelphia. Watson acted as a district attorney, collecting testimony, investigating the crimes, presenting evidence to grand juries in Alabama and Mississippi, and holding trials in the Mayor's Court of Philadelphia. Moreover, Mayor Watson was one of the first City officials who acknowledged and sought to reduce the vulnerability of Philadelphia's African American citizens as victims of crime; and

WHEREAS, It is important in the course of current events to remember Philadelphia's history and heroes like Mayor Joseph Watson, who demonstrated Brotherly Love in setting the oppressed free. Mayor Watson's commitment to justice and his love for his fellow man should be celebrated and shared widely as an inspiration to a country which continues to struggle with racial reconciliation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby recognize and honor Philadelphia Mayor Joseph Watson for rescuing African American children who were kidnapped from Philadelphia.

RESOLVED FURTHER, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, headquartered in Philadelphia, evidencing the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.

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