



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and honoring the outstanding contributions and achievements of Julian Abele, an accomplished architect and Philadelphia resident.

WHEREAS, Julian Francis Abele, the first African-American graduate of the Architecture Program at the University of Pennsylvania, received scant recognition during his lifetime despite his many significant professional contributions; and

WHEREAS, Although Fiske Kimball, noted architectural historian and director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, acknowledged that Abele was one of the most sensitive designers anywhere in America in 1942, Abele remained virtually unknown outside Philadelphia's architectural community until the 1970s and 1980s; and

WHEREAS, Born in Philadelphia in 1881, Abele lived most of his life in the city, residing at 1515 Christian Street for several decades of his adult life; and

WHEREAS, An accomplished student, Abele graduated from the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art in 1898 and entered the prestigious Architecture Program at the University of Pennsylvania that same year, where he won several impressive awards and served as president of the University's Architectural Society during his senior year; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from Penn in 1902, Abele augmented his education by studying architectural design at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts while working evenings for the noted Philadelphia architect Louis C. Hickman; and

WHEREAS, Abele spent the next few years studying design in Paris and was influenced by 18th Century French architecture throughout his career; and

WHEREAS, In 1906, Abele returned to Philadelphia and joined the firm of Horace Trumbauer, a popular architectural design house that was responsible for many mansions in Philadelphia, New York and Newport, Rhode Island, as well as apartment houses, offices, school buildings, theaters, hospitals, clubhouses, churches, libraries and museums; and

WHEREAS, One of Abele's largest projects was the firm's commission to design and supervise the construction of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and

WHEREAS, In 1909, he ascended to the firm's top position, chief designer, a remarkable accomplishment in light of his young age and race and he continued to be the top designer of the Trumbauer firm until his death in 1950; and

WHEREAS, He designed the Duke University Chapel, as well as many other buildings on the campus; and

WHEREAS, In 1942, Abele was elected to the American Institute of Architects; and

WHEREAS, In his private life, Abele was a quiet, serious man, yet brilliant and witty, who appreciated all things French, enjoying fine wine, classical music and opera and who engaged in watercolor painting, sketching, jewelry and furniture making; and

WHEREAS, He married Marguerite Bulle, a French woman, and had two children, a son and a daughter, but after several years the couple parted although they never divorced; and

WHEREAS, Today, we appreciate Abele as one of the early 20th Century's most adept designers of revival buildings, who rejuvenated many long-dormant styles as vital, modern forms of architectural expression and changed the skyline of Philadelphia and much of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That council does hereby recognize and honor the outstanding contributions and achievements of Julian Abele, an accomplished architect and Philadelphia resident.