

Legislation Text

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Honoring the Montier Family of Philadelphia and Cheltenham and recognizing their historical significance and contributions to our region.

WHEREAS, During the early colonial period, prior to the establishment of our nation, William Penn received a large land grant from King Charles II of England, as a repayment of a debt owed his father; and

WHEREAS, In the course of developing what would be known as Pennsylvania, Penn required prospective landowners to purchase parcels of land in the wilderness as a precondition to buying land in the City; and

WHEREAS, In 1682, a group of 15 Quakers pooled their resources to acquire land from William Penn, and the wilderness portion of their new land became Cheltenham Township, one of the nation's earliest suburbs; and

WHEREAS, One of these landowners was Humphrey Morrey, who controlled 250 acres in the western portion of Cheltenham, and who would be appointed by Penn as Philadelphia's first mayor in 1691; and

WHEREAS, In spite of their vital role in the formation of the white abolitionist movement, some Quakers, including Morrey, were slaveholders; and

WHEREAS, Upon his death, Humphrey Morrey bequeathed his human property to his children, and one enslaved woman, known as Cremona, or "Moonie," went to the home of his youngest son Richard; and

WHEREAS, Richard Morrey and Cremona fell in love, were married and had five children - a rare example from that time and place in history of a consensual relationship between a man of European descent and a woman of African descent; and

WHEREAS, After Richard died, Cremona, who was left 198 acres of land in his will, met and in 1766 married Jean Montier, a black man of French Caribbean descent, and they later had one son; and

WHEREAS, The Montiers, including the children of Richard and Cremona, built a homestead in Cheltenham where they lived and made boots and shoes, and established a shop in Philadelphia which went on to prosper and bring them considerable wealth; and

WHEREAS, The descendants of Richard and Cremona have played crucial roles in the history of our nation, like serving in the Union Army during the Civil War, and in the sustaining of the local black community, including establishing and supporting churches, burial grounds and mutual aid societies; and

WHEREAS, In 1841, Hiram and Elizabeth Montier commissioned a pair of sitting self portraits in oil, an option which, at the time, was only available to families with wealth, very few of whom were of African descent; and

WHEREAS, Those rare and unique examples of American art were handed down through several generations

of Montiers and were privately held until one descendant, William Pickens III, inspired by the historic election of the first black President of the United States, lent them to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for public display; and

WHEREAS, The history of the Montiers, dating back more than three centuries and including the portraits of Hiram and Elizabeth, the home in Cheltenham, and a trove of documents, has been the subject of several articles and documentaries, including a new half-hour documentary produced by WHY?; and

WHEREAS, The story of the Montiers reminds us that this nation would not have been built if not for the efforts of a broad and diverse group of individuals, all of whom deserve a share of the prosperity it creates; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That this Council does hereby honor the Montier family of Philadelphia and Cheltenham and recognize their historical significance and contributions to our region.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to William Pickens III and other descendants of the Montiers, as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.