

Legislation Text

File #: 220150, **Version:** 0

Also naming the 6300 block of Lancaster Avenue as Absalom Jones Way, to commemorate the Reverend Absalom Jones and his legacy as an abolitionist, clergyman and the founder of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, the first African American Episcopal Church in The United States.

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones was born enslaved on November 7, 1746, in Sussex, Delaware; and

WHEREAS, While living the early years of his life deprived of his freedom, Absalom Jones was moved to Philadelphia where he worked as a clerk in his enslaver's store. He learned how to read and write, and earned an education by attending an all Black night school; and

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones married Mary Thomas and purchased her freedom from her enslaver. In 1784, he was granted his freedom; and

WHEREAS, In 1785, Absalom Jones met Richard Allen. They became lay preachers at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church and together they increased the black membership of the congregation by tenfold; and

WHEREAS, In 1787, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen founded the Free African Society, one of the earliest Black self-help mutual aid societies which Dr. W.E.B. DuBois called "the first wavering step of a people toward organized social life"; and

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones spent his time with the Free African Society by leading the group in their social, political, and humanitarian goals. The organization was dedicated to assisting widows and orphans, as well as assisting with sick relief and burial expenses; and

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen protested the decision of the White members of St. George's to segregate the Black members in the balcony of the church by leading a walk-out; and

WHEREAS, The members of the Free African Society decided to organize The African Church of Philadelphia, and thereafter, the majority of the congregation wished to affiliate themselves with the Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen organized members of the Black community to assist the City of Philadelphia during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793. They were instrumental in assisting the sick in a variety of ways -- acting as nurses, taking care of the sick, burying the dead, and working as undertakers. After a racist pamphlet was circulated alleging that Black nurses treating the sick were profiting from their services, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen published an opposing article detailing their heroic actions to assist the sick and dying. Their work assisting those affected by the epidemic was defended and commended by the then Mayor of Philadelphia, Matthew Clarkson; and

WHEREAS, Absalom Jones helped found African freemasonry in Pennsylvania by establishing a Masonic lodge in Philadelphia in 1797 under the authority of Grand Master Prince Hall of Boston; and

WHEREAS, After parting ways with Richard Allen, Absalom Jones founded The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in 1792. St. Thomas was accepted into the Episcopal Diocese. Absalom Jones was ordained by Bishop William White as the first African American Episcopal Priest in 1802; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Jones was an ardent abolitionist, dedicated to eradicating the practice of slavery. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793, Reverend Jones drafted multiple petitions criticizing the legislation as cruel and brutal. Unfortunately, these petitions were rejected by the U.S. House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Jones passed away on February 13, 1818, at the age of 71 and his earthly remains are interred in the altar of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Reverend Jones has been listed on the Episcopal Church's Calendar of Saints, memorialized on the date of his death; and

WHEREAS, The selfless dedication of the Reverend Absalom Jones to the religious community in Philadelphia, and his inspiring actions to abolish slavery should be forever remembered and memorialized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Absalom Jones' legacy in the City of Philadelphia be memorialized and that the 6300 block of Lancaster Avenue shall henceforth be known as "Absalom Jones Way."

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the congregation of The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, as evidence of the sincere admiration and respect of this legislative body.