

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 92

By Sparks

A RESOLUTION to recognize the importance of the rich and vast history of the State of Tennessee.

WHEREAS, the history of the people of the State of Tennessee is woven together like a rich tapestry with beautiful intersecting threads of diverse heritages and cultures that should be carefully preserved and accurately communicated to this generation and those generations yet to come; and

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee is proud to have been called home by an extraordinary number of well-known American heroes and legendary figures, but it is also very proud of those Tennesseans whose life stories of struggle and effort, though not often shared, improved the quality of life for every citizen; and

WHEREAS, one such little-known but courageous Tennessean was Sampson W. Keeble, who, in 1872, was the first African American elected to serve in the Tennessee House of Representatives; a Nashville barber and businessman, he was born into slavery in Rutherford County near Smyrna around 1832; and

WHEREAS, moving to Nashville after the Civil War, Mr. Keeble established the Rock City Barber Shop and was an active leader and member of the advisory board of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company and treasurer of the board of directors of the Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association; and

WHEREAS, a member of the Davidson County Republican Party, Sampson Keeble was one of thirteen African Americans to serve in the General Assembly during Reconstruction; during his time in office, he sought passage of three pieces of legislation: one to amend Nashville's charter to allow African Americans to operate businesses in the downtown area; one

to protect African-American laborers and their wages; and one to gain state funds for the Tennessee Manual Labor University; and

WHEREAS, after his service in the General Assembly, Mr. Keeble served as a magistrate in Davidson County; he sought to return to the legislature in 1878 but lost to a candidate from the Greenback Party; and

WHEREAS, largely marginalized throughout much of the history of the United States, African Americans were almost entirely omitted from historical documentation in this country until the 1920s, even though they were active participants in every major event and period since the nation's founding; and

WHEREAS, almost 136 years after his legislative service to the State of Tennessee, Sampson Keeble's story and that of the first African Americans to serve in the General Assembly was most appropriately honored when a bust in the likeness of Mr. Keeble was commissioned by act of the General Assembly and placed in the State Capitol in 2010; and

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee has also been called home by individuals whose accomplishments and activities were honored during their lifetimes, but who, through the veil of time and distance, are now remembered and viewed primarily by their personal faults and actions that, by today's standards, are reprehensible and unimaginable; and

WHEREAS, admired during his lifetime, General Nathan Bedford Forrest is viewed by some as a Civil War Hero - a military genius and cavalry leader who rose from the enlisted ranks to become a general for the Confederacy - and reviled by others as the father of the Ku Klux Klan; and

WHEREAS, born in 1821 near Chapel Hill, Nathan Bedford Forrest came from a poor family; a self-made man, he made a fortune as a slave trader, planter, and speculator. A wizard of the saddle, he purportedly had twenty-nine horses shot out from underneath him during the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, a leader in the earliest iteration of the Ku Klux Klan, General Forrest is not considered the founder of the organization by most historians but was elected the organization's

first Grand Wizard, the highest possible leadership post. Historians all agree that he eventually left the group and renounced its racist actions; and

WHEREAS, at the end of his life, General Forrest started attending church and advocated for black civil rights while living in Memphis, according to *Nathan Bedford Forrest's Redemption*, written by Shane Kastler; and

WHEREAS, today, a bust of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the Confederate General and former slave owner, is on display in the State Capitol merely twenty steps from that of Sampson Keeble, the gentleman born into slavery who became the first African American to serve in the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, to truly know the history of Tennessee, it is important for all Tennesseans to reflect upon all of our State's past, to learn our shared history, to understand the courage and sacrifices of those who came before us, to gain insight from our mistakes and successes, and to understand that the lessons learned yesterday and today will carry us forward if we thoughtfully and earnestly strive to understand and appreciate our heritage and the opportunities that lie before us; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we recognize the importance of the rich and vast history of the State of Tennessee and encourage every citizen to learn about Tennessee history from every perspective, the mournful, the tragic, and the uplifting, to truly appreciate the people, the culture, and the legacy of Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.