

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 92

Honoring the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Ms. BUSH submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Honoring the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing.

Whereas the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing is dedicated as part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, located on the Mississippi Greenway along the St. Louis riverfront;

Whereas Mary Meachum and her husband, Reverend John Berry Meachum, were abolitionists who dedicated their entire lives to educating and freeing enslaved people;

Whereas John Berry Meachum, born enslaved on May 3, 1789, in Goochland County, Virginia, worked as a carpenter and purchased his own freedom at the age of 21;

Whereas, after freeing himself from enslavement, Meachum walked 700 miles to Hanover County, Virginia, to purchase his father's freedom;

Whereas, after purchasing his father's freedom, the pair walked 700 miles back to Kentucky, where they promptly purchased the freedom of John's mother and siblings, with John meeting his future wife soon after;

Whereas Mary Meachum was born into slavery in Kentucky in 1801 and forcibly relocated to St. Louis, Missouri, when she was only 14 years old;

Whereas Mary was forced to leave behind her newly beloved, John Berry Meachum, but John followed her to St. Louis and bought her freedom;

Whereas, in 1825, St. Louis passed an ordinance that made it illegal for Black Americans to assemble without a permit from the city and a police officer present, making education nearly impossible to attain;

Whereas, in 1827, the couple established the First African Baptist Church in St. Louis, the oldest Black American church west of the Mississippi River, whose congregation primarily consisted of enslaved people who were permitted by their owners to attend;

Whereas Reverend Meachum began a school for Black Americans and secretly taught students in the basement of the church by candlelight, also known as a candle tallow school;

Whereas, in 1847, soon after Missouri outlawed all education for both freed and enslaved Black Missourians, the school was dismantled by the police;

Whereas, in defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the Meachums' home was a waypoint on the Underground Railroad, where they helped countless enslaved people escape to Illinois, where slavery was outlawed;

Whereas, after John’s death in February 1854, Mary Meachum continued their tireless abolitionist work educating and freeing enslaved people;

Whereas, on the night of May 21, 1855, a small group of enslaved people were captured by enslavers and law enforcement, giving up Mary Meachum’s name as the arranger of the escape attempt and listing her home as the rendezvous point where they began their journey;

Whereas Mary Meachum was arrested and charged with slave theft under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850;

Whereas, following a long series of heroic, selfless, and historic fights for the freedom and education of enslaved people, Mary Meachum passed away in St. Louis in 1869; and

Whereas, in 2001, the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing was dedicated as part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, a congressionally mandated program of the National Park Service that honors, preserves, and promotes the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
 2 *concurring), That Congress—*

3 (1) honors the lives and work of Mary and John
 4 Meachum and recognizes the importance of the
 5 Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing as a part of this
 6 Nation’s history; and

7 (2) elevates Black History Month as a time to
 8 evoke historical memory about the sacrifices and

- 1 contributions made by Black Americans, particularly
- 2 Black abolitionists.

