

2009 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 872

Commemorating the tercentenary of the birth of Samuel Johnson.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 13, 2009
Agreed to by the Senate, February 19, 2009

WHEREAS, the English people in 2000 declared Samuel Johnson (1709 - 1784) to be the greatest Englishman of the Second Millennium; and

WHEREAS, born on September 13, 1709, Samuel Johnson has been well described as "the most distinguished man of letters in English history"; and

WHEREAS, Samuel Johnson, after many years of astonishing reading and nine years of drudgery, in 1755 produced the first comprehensive *Dictionary of the English Language*, while across the English Channel no fewer than 40 scholars required 40 years to compile a similar work for the French; and

WHEREAS, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, hailed as "one of the greatest single achievements of scholarship" in all of human history, profoundly influenced Virginians for fully 150 years; and

WHEREAS, Samuel Johnson was devoted to "the common reader" as a political reporter, a poet, and an essayist, tirelessly promoting—and also practicing—charity so remarkable that of him a great American scholar declared "no other moralist in history excels or even begins to rival him"; and

WHEREAS, even in writing of the towering work of Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson has been described as "the rarest of all literary geniuses" and a critic whose "vigorous and comprehensive understanding threw more light on [Shakespeare] than all his predecessors had done"; and

WHEREAS, the renowned economist Adam Smith, whose *The Wealth of Nations* greatly influenced the Framers of the American republic, observed that "Johnson knew more books than any man alive," while the renowned political thinker and parliamentarian Edmund Burke said that had Johnson joined the government, "he certainly would have been the greatest speaker that ever was" in Parliament; and

WHEREAS, Samuel Johnson is the subject of the most famous single work of biographical art—Boswell's *Life*—in the whole of the literature of the world; and

WHEREAS, Samuel Johnson was renowned, not only for his learning and his writing, but also for his personality, characterized by devout faith; his devotion to friends—he was "the most clubbable of men"; his rollicking love of children; his charity to the poor; and his love of country and a larger love of justice, so that literary scholars and historians alike refer with admiration to "The Age of Johnson" as bearing the incomparable stamp of his influence; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commemorate the tercentenary of the birth of Samuel Johnson by encouraging the rising generation to rediscover the life and legacy of one of the singular embodiments of the English-speaking tradition; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Johnson Society of Virginia as an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude for the organization's many efforts to educate citizens about the far-reaching achievements of Samuel Johnson and to preserve his life and works for future generations to study and enjoy.

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