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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 953

Offered February 21, 2011

Commending St. John's Church on its 400th anniversary.

Patrons—McClellan, Carr, Cox, J.A., Janis, Loupassi, Marshall, R.G., McQuinn, Morrissey, O'Bannon and Peace

WHEREAS, in 1611 the third oldest Anglican parish in the New World was established at the second English settlement, the "Citie of Henricus," on the James River just south of modern-day Richmond; and

WHEREAS, The Reverend Alexander Whitaker, first rector of Henrico Parish, the forerunner of Henrico County, laid plans to establish the first university in the New World at Henricus, convinced the Board of Directors of the Virginia Company of London to keep their investment in the fledgling Virginia Colony, led the American Indian princess Pocahontas/Matoaka to convert to Christianity and baptized her, and later performed the marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, Esquire, of Varina Plantation; and

WHEREAS, St. John's Church was established in 1741 on Church Hill in Richmond on land donated by Richmond's founder, Colonel William Byrd II of Westover, which is the current seat of Henrico Parish; and

WHEREAS, on March 23, 1775, the fourth day after the opening of the Second Virginia Convention at St. John's Church, Patrick Henry, a self-made lawyer from Hanover, made a declaration in St. John's Church that would ignite the fire of the War of the Revolution in the hearts of many of his countrymen; Mr. Henry declared passionately to his fellow delegates, "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Virginia broke from the English Crown on July 4, 1776, and the Anglican Church in America subsequently established the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, now known as The Episcopal Church; and

WHEREAS, the burying ground surrounding historic St. John's Church is the final resting place of Governor James Wood; Governor John Page; George Wythe, signer of the Declaration of Independence; and many other courageous Virginians, who fought in almost every war since the War of the Revolution to protect our republic's precious liberties; and

WHEREAS, it is important and necessary that the people of the Commonwealth reflect upon our shared history to understand and appreciate that the story of Henrico Parish represents the history of the American people; and

WHEREAS, Henrico Parish has witnessed and its parishioners have contributed significantly to: the exploration and settlement of America; the concept of religious freedom and the exercise thereof in worship and ministries benefiting the community and the Commonwealth; the growth of a thriving agricultural economy in the New World; the road to revolution that led the colonists to break from the English Crown and form a representative government; the spiritual nurture of all people, including the establishment of one of the first African American schools in the 1850s; the tragedy of a devastating civil war that pitted North against South; and the rise of the United States as a world power in the 19th and 20th centuries; and

WHEREAS, the struggle for individual and religious freedoms that we enjoy today is the common thread that runs through each of the aforementioned historic events; and

WHEREAS, Henrico Parish's place in Virginia history should be explored, understood, and remembered by all Virginians, and the relevance of its history to contemporary society becomes even more important and compelling as the Commonwealth welcomes the nation and the world to Virginia on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Henrico Parish, a year-long commemoration of the founding of St. John's Church; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend St. John's Church on its 400th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Honorable Robert F. McDonnell, Governor of Virginia, be requested to call this observance to the attention of people of the Commonwealth, encouraging them to become acquainted with the role of historic St. John's Church in the formation of Virginia and the nation, and to participate in the commemorative events; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Reverend Laura D. Inscoc, Rector of St. John's Church, as an expression of the General Assembly's recognition of Henrico Parish's illustrious history and St. John's Church's place of honor in the history of the Commonwealth and this nation.