

2020 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 144

Recognizing the contributions of James River Bateamen.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 29, 2020
Agreed to by the Senate, March 3, 2020

WHEREAS, from the 1770s through the mid-1800s, thousands of merchant sailors known as bateamen were instrumental to the economic growth and development of Richmond and the James River region; and

WHEREAS, at a time when the area west of Richmond's fall line was only accessible by horse, the narrow riverboat called a bateau was a groundbreaking mode of transportation, quickly becoming the primary means by which goods traveled along the James River; and

WHEREAS, while the bateau greatly improved the efficiency with which goods could be transported, their operation was often difficult and perilous; bateamen, typically working in groups of three and steering with long poles, were required to maneuver their heavily laden bateau through a maze of rocks and rapids to safely reach their destination; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that over 90 percent of bateamen were either free or enslaved African Americans and that from the 1820s to the 1840s, when trade along the James River was at its peak, approximately 1,500 bateamen operated over 500 bateaux; and

WHEREAS, with their navigational prowess and unparalleled knowledge of Virginia's waterways, many bateamen were enlisted by the Union Forces during the Civil War to aid the Union blockade of the Confederate states, greatly contributing to the success of that operation; and

WHEREAS, the legacy of the bateamen was recently commemorated by a Virginia Board of Historic Resources historical highway marker, which was sponsored by the owners of Bateau, LLC, a restaurant in Richmond's Shockoe Bottom district located not far from where the bateamen used to dock; and

WHEREAS, unveiled in 1993, the Headman Statue on Brown's Island in Richmond depicts a 19th century bateaman, honoring the contributions that thousands of African Americans made to the city's economy in its early years; and

WHEREAS, until the James River and Kanawha Canal reached Lynchburg in 1840, the bateamen bravely provided a service essential to the prosperity of several industries in the James River region, making them both major contributors to the economic success of the Commonwealth and significant figures in its history; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the contributions of James River bateamen be recognized; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution to Bateau, LLC, requesting that it further disseminate copies of this resolution to its respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.

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