

2016 SESSION

INTRODUCED

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HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 237

Offered March 9, 2016

Commending First Baptist Church of Coolwell.

Patron—Cline

WHEREAS, on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued as an Executive Order by President Abraham Lincoln; and

WHEREAS, the Emancipation Proclamation proclaimed the freedom of slaves in 10 states and applied to three to four million enslaved persons in the southern states; and

WHEREAS, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation, in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, escaped slaves were either returned to their masters or held as contraband to be later returned; and

WHEREAS, the Emancipation Proclamation applied only to slaves in Confederate-held lands and did not apply to those in the four slave states that were not in rebellion (Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, and Missouri, which were unnamed), nor to Tennessee and lower Louisiana, and it specifically excluded those counties of Virginia soon to form the state of West Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the Emancipation Proclamation specifically excluded (by name) some regions already controlled by the Union Army, and emancipation in those places would come after separate state actions or the December 1865 ratification of the 13th Amendment, which made slavery and indentured servitude, except for those duly convicted of a crime, illegal everywhere subject to the jurisdiction of the United States; and

WHEREAS, following the Emancipation Proclamation, many free blacks and formerly enslaved blacks moved to and settled in Coolwell; and

WHEREAS, First Baptist Church of Coolwell was one of the first black churches founded independently of a white congregation; organized in 1861 by the Reverend Turner, the church has served the Coolwell community, which was originally named for a nearby location with a well that contained cool water, for 155 years; and

WHEREAS, Sweet Briar College, which maintains a close association with First Baptist Church of Coolwell, was founded in 1901 as the legacy of Indiana Fletcher Williams, who left her entire estate to establish an institution in the memory of her only daughter, Daisy; and

WHEREAS, Sweet Briar originally served as a plantation, and its owner, Elijah Fletcher, was one of the 10 largest slave owners in Amherst County; 67 slaves were listed by name in his will and divided among his three children upon his death in 1858; and

WHEREAS, after emancipation, several of those 67 individuals continued to work at the farms as laborers and tenant farmers; their labor provided the income for and contributed to the success of the newly-founded Sweet Briar College; and

WHEREAS, Martha Penn, a former slave in Lynchburg who was bought by Elijah Fletcher, moved to Coolwell after emancipation; and

WHEREAS, many families, among them the Jones, Johnson, Hutcherson, Scott, Warricks, and Jordan families, either worked or lived in Coolwell and were members of First Baptist Church of Coolwell; and

WHEREAS, many free blacks buried at First Baptist Church of Coolwell Cemetery once worked at Sweet Briar during both the plantation days and after it became a college; and

WHEREAS, oral histories reveal that many men and women who worked at Sweet Briar lived in Coolwell and walked several miles on foot to reach work; and

WHEREAS, Signora Hollins, who is buried with her family in the cemetery, recalled playing during her childhood with Daisy, the only daughter of Indiana Fletcher and Henry Williams, a human example of the historic bond between First Baptist Church of Coolwell and Sweet Briar College; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That First Baptist Church of Coolwell hereby be commended for its legacy of spiritual leadership and service to African Americans in the region and the entire Coolwell community; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to First Baptist Church of Coolwell as an expression of the House of Delegates' admiration for the church's contributions to Coolwell, Amherst County, and the Commonwealth.

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