



RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 284

EFFECTIVE August 2, 2022

WHEREAS, The majority of the African American men connected to Providence who served in the Revolutionary War were soldiers in the First Rhode Island Regiment, led by Colonel Christopher Greene; and

WHEREAS, The regiment had gone through many changes, the most notable was when the Continental Army reorganized in 1777, and the regiment had come under Colonel Greene's leadership; and

WHEREAS, Free Black men and enslaved men were barred from enlisting in the Continental Army by George Washington due to the fact that it was feared that arming slaves would result in a rebellion and spell disaster for the cause; and

WHEREAS, Due to the difficulty in maintaining a standing army and the poor wages paid to the soldiers in the Continental Army, it was suggested by General James Mitchell Varnum to allow slaves and free Black men to enlist in the continental army. Between February 1778 and June 1778 enslaved men were able to enlist, and their masters were compensated; and

WHEREAS, Of the 225 men enlisted in the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, 140 were described as "negro, mulatto or mustee." The first three enslaved men were recruited on February 25, 1778. It was not until March 6, 1778 when two men from Providence were recruited, Africa Burke and Sigby Talbot; and

WHEREAS, The first Rhode Island Regiment under Colonel Greene's leadership, saw their first action during the "Battle of Rhode Island," which took place in August 1778, 2 months after the last slaves were permitted to join the regiment; and

WHEREAS, In 1781 they were sent to Westchester, New York to link up with the Continental Army and eventually found themselves in the "neutral zone." Essentially a barren area along the Hudson River Valley and sparsely populated area that was sandwiched between the British and Continental lines; and

WHEREAS, Their duty in the Neutral Zone was to stop any intruders from loyalist Brigadier General James Delancey's men from scavenging and foraging in the neutral zone. This resulted in an attack by Delancey's Refugee Corps, and the ensuing battle became known as the Battle of Pines Bridge; and

WHEREAS, After the battle, the total dead were Colonel Christopher Green, eight of his Black bodyguards, who died to a man defending Colonel Greene, and Major Ebenezer Flagg. Legend states that Colonel Greene's body was mutilated by Delancey's men, because he was leading Black troops; and

WHEREAS, As a result of Colonel Greene's death, Lt. Colonel Jeremiah Olney was given command of the unit, where he remained until January of 1783. The next major battle they participated in was the Battle of Yorktown, which is one of the last major actions of the Revolutionary War; and

WHEREAS, The Regiment was demobilized in Saratoga on December 25, 1783. Hundreds of miles from home and with little pay, the remaining Black soldiers of the 1st Rhode Island marched home. Some remained destitute upon arrival, petitioning in June of 1784 to receive back-wages or some form of assistance. Ultimately, the Rhode Island assembly passed a law in 1785 stating "the support of paupers, who heretofore were slaves, and enlisted in the continental battalions."; and

WHEREAS, The regiment carries the distinction of being one of the few units to serve the entirety of the war; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the men serving in the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, other men connected to Providence had served throughout the Continental Army in other state regiments, as well as the Continental Navy and the state militia; and

WHEREAS, It is crucial for the City of Providence to symbolically recognize the role and impact of the African American Revolutionary War soldiers from Providence by establishing a commission for the creation of a monument for the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the Providence City Council does hereby establish the Providence African American Revolutionary War Memorial Commission, which shall be comprised of no more than 5 members and shall include:


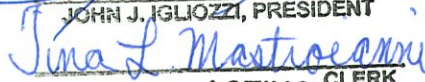
3 members appointed by the City Council; and

2 members appointed by the Mayor.

The City Archivist shall serve as an ex-officio non-voting member to advise in all matters related to the commission.

IN CITY COUNCIL

JUL 21 2022
READ AND PASSED


JOHN J. IGLIOZZI, PRESIDENT

Tina L. Mastroianni
ACTING CLERK

Effective without the
Mayor's Signature


Tina L. Mastroianni
Acting City Clerk