ASSEMBLY, No. 4044

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 7, 2020

Sponsored by:
Assemblyman ANTWAN L. MCCLELLAN
District 1 (Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman B.DeCroce, Assemblymen Wirths, Space, Zwicker, Assemblywoman Dunn, Assemblymen Peterson, Simonsen, Assemblywomen Stanfield, Tucker, Sumter and Assemblyman Thomson

SYNOPSIS

Designates Howell House in Cape May as Harriet Tubman Museum in New Jersey.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/18/2020)

AN ACT recognizing the Howell House on Lafayette Street in Cape May, New Jersey as the Harriet Tubman Museum in New Jersey and supplementing chapter 9A of Title 52 of the Revised Statutes.

WHEREAS, The Macedonia Baptist Church was officially recognized as a Baptist church by the West New Jersey Baptist Association on December 23, 1895 and was organized to provide a place for African-American residents of the city of Cape May to practice their faith together; and

WHEREAS, The Macedonia Baptist Church continues to meet today in its historic church building, part of which dates back to 1799, on the corner of Lafayette and Franklin Streets, in a neighborhood that contains most of Cape May's civic institutions, and that was the core of the city's African-American society for much of the 20th century; and

WHEREAS, Next to the church stands one of Cape May's oldest houses, the Howell House, which was built in 1850 and willed to the church in 1909 by its former owner, Philadelphia Quaker Joseph Howell, and has been used as a parsonage until only a few decades ago; and

WHEREAS, The house has been acknowledged as "a contributing resource to the Cape May National Historic Landmark district," and in 2012, was declared one of New Jersey's top-10 endangered historic structures by Preservation New Jersey, a Statewide private historic preservation organization; and

WHEREAS, On December 16, 2018, the church signed a lease with developers Robert and Zack Mullock that will permit the Mullocks to renovate the Howell House into a museum honoring Harriet Tubman, with an expected completion date in 2020; and

WHEREAS, Plans for the museum indicate that it will showcase Harriet Tubman's role as a champion of civil rights and the time she spent in Cape May in the 1850s earning income to support her efforts in the Underground Railroad, a network of safe houses designed to help African-American slaves escape into free territories; and

WHEREAS, In addition to fighting for abolition and becoming a Civil War heroine, Harriet Tubman spent her summers between 1850 and 1852 in Cape May; and

WHEREAS, Given New Jersey's role in allowing safe passage for many on the Underground Railroad and the significance of Harriet Tubman's contribution to the freedom of dozens of people, supported by her time in Cape May, it is altogether fitting and proper that this State recognize the Howell House on Lafayette Street in Cape May, New Jersey as the Harriet Tubman Museum in New Jersey; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The Howell House on Lafayette Street in Cape May, New Jersey is recognized as the Harriet Tubman Museum in New Jersey

2. This act shall take effect on June 19, 2020, known as Juneteenth Independence Day.

STATEMENT

The bill designates the Howell House on Lafayette Street in Cape May, New Jersey the official New Jersey Harriet Tubman Museum.

The Macedonia Baptist Church was organized in 1895 to provide a place for African-American residents of the city of Cape May to practice their faith. The congregation continues to meet today in its historic church building on Lafayette Street, in a neighborhood that was the core of the city's African-American society for much of the 20th century. Next to the church is one of Cape May's oldest houses, the Howell House, given to the church in 1909 by Joseph Howell, which has been used as a parsonage until only a few decades ago. On December 16, 2018, the church signed a lease with developers Robert and Zack Mullock that will permit them to renovate the Howell House into a museum honoring Harriet Tubman, with an expected completion date in 2020.

The museum will showcase Harriet Tubman's role as a champion of civil rights and the time she spent in Cape May in the 1850s earning income to support her efforts in the Underground Railroad. In addition to fighting for abolition and becoming a Civil War heroine, Harriet Tubman spent her summers between 1850 and 1852 in Cape May. Thus, given New Jersey's role in allowing safe passage for many on the Underground Railroad, and the significance of Harriet Tubman's contribution to the freedom of dozens of people, supported by her time in Cape May, and given the historical significance of the Macedonia Baptist Church area to the African-American community, it is appropriate for this State to designate the Howell House on Lafayette Street in Cape May, New Jersey as the official New Jersey Harriet Tubman Museum.

Consistent with current practice, the bill provides that State or other public funds are not to be used for producing, purchasing, or erecting any signs bearing the designation provided for in the bill. The bill authorizes the Governor, or the designee thereof, to receive financial assistance from non-profit, non-governmental, and private sources to be used for producing, purchasing, or erecting any signs bearing the designation.