**A** **HOUSE RESOLUTION**

TO REMEMBER THE LIFE OF FRAZIER B. BAKER, POSTMASTER OF LAKE CITY WHO WAS MURDERED BY A WHITE MOB OUTSIDE HIS BURNING HOME ON FEBRUARY 22, 1898, AND TO DECLARE TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022, AS A DAY TO HONOR HIS MEMORY.

Whereas, Frazier B. Baker was a married forty‑year‑old African American schoolteacher and the father of six children, who was appointed as postmaster of Lake City in 1897 during the administration of President William McKinley; and

Whereas, local whites who resented black Republican officeholders resisted McKinley’s recess appointments and launched a campaign to force Mr. Baker’s removal. Williamsburg County was sixty‑three percent black, but Lake City was overwhelmingly white; and

Whereas, whites initiated a boycott of the Lake City post office, and circulated petitions calling for the dismissal of Mr. Baker, a member of the Colored Farmers Alliance, claiming that he had cut mail delivery from three times a day to one due to threats against his life, threats he communicated to his superiors in Washington, D. C.; and

Whereas, a postal inspector investigated the complaints and advised that the post office be closed. In response, a white mob burned it down, sure that no one would rent another space while Mr. Baker remained postmaster. When racial tension lessened and space was found on the edge of town, Mr. Baker sent for his family; and

Whereas, when efforts failed to secure his removal, a white mob attacked him and his family on February 22, 1898, at their house, which also served as the post office. The family awoke to find their house on fire; and

Whereas, when Mr. Baker’s attempts to put out the fire failed, he sent his son to find help, but as soon as the son opened the door, his son was met with gunfire, so Mr. Baker pulled him back into the house. He told his wife, Lavinia, that they might as well die running as standing still, and they started for the door; and

Whereas, before he opened the door, a bullet struck and killed his two‑year‑old daughter, held by his wife, so he threw open the door and was fatally shot as well. Mrs. Baker and two other children were wounded, yet they escaped when his wife rallied the family from the burning house. For three days, they received no medical treatment; and

Whereas, coverage of the event was extensive, and the lynching was met with widespread condemnation, including across the South. A grand jury in Williamsburg County failed to return any indictments, and the McKinley Administration conducted a robust investigation. On July 1, 1898, prosecutors indicted seven men in the murder of Mr. Baker, and ultimately, thirteen were indicted in United States Circuit Court on charges of murder, conspiracy to commit murder, assault, and destruction of mail on April 7, 1899; and

Whereas, the trial was held in federal court during April 1899. The jury deliberated for twenty‑four hours, but a mistrial was declared in a deadlocked five‑to‑five verdict. The case was never retried; and

Whereas, on May 2, 1898, a mass meeting was held at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston where a resolution was passed condemning the attack and the congregation collected funds to assist the Baker family. Family members led fundraising efforts to help the Baker family relocate to Massachusetts; and

Whereas, the Bakers remained in Boston, where the four surviving children died from tuberculosis during an epidemic. When her last child died in 1942, Lavinia Baker returned to Florence County, living in Cartersville until her death in 1947; and

Whereas, in 1918, St. James AME Church was constructed on the site of Mr. Baker’s burned post office and house. On October 5, 1955, St. James was burned down. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:

That the members of the South Carolina House of Representatives, by this resolution, remember the life of Frazier B. Baker, Postmaster of Lake City, who was murdered by a white mob outside his burning home on February 22, 1898, and declare Tuesday, February 22, 2022, as a day to honor his memory.

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