

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation

Proclamation No. 25-0243 Honoring William H. Whitsell, the First Black Man Born in Colorado

WHEREAS, William Henry Whitsell, the first known Black male child born in Colorado, was born on February 24, 1866, to Matilda and James Whitsell in Central City, Gilpin County; and

WHEREAS, William's mother and father were likely freed slaves who came west to help build the railroad, eventually settling in Denver where Union Station stands today; and

WHEREAS, William grew up in Denver, attended Denver's public schools, and became a brick molder, also known as a brick mason, for the A.J. Baker Company where he performed in an exemplary fashion, assisting in the construction of many buildings in lower downtown Denver; and

WHEREAS, William was a lifetime member of Campbell's African Methodist Episcopal Church in Denver's City Park West neighborhood and was known as a God-fearing man of great ethics, high moral character and great fortitude; and

WHEREAS, William was a lifetime active member of the Masonic Lodge, the Fraternal Order of Elks and the Odd Fellows, where he displayed his interest in civic responsibility; and

WHEREAS, William was husband to Cora Tillman, and father to two sons and one daughter, all of whom became upstanding citizens and have now branched out into five living generations that still live in Denver and Colorado to this day; and

WHEREAS, William H. Whitsell Park at 4000 North Kirk Street in Denver's Green Valley Ranch neighborhood was dedicated in his honor on September 9th, 2023, to celebrate the history, impact, and contributions of William, his descendants, and Black people in Denver and the state of Colorado; and

WHEREAS, William was inducted into the Blacks in Colorado Hall of Fame on February 3rd, 2024, as part of the 2024 Juanita Gray Community Service Awards and the Blacks in Colorado Hall of Fame Ceremony at the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library; and

WHEREAS, William is buried at the Fairmount Cemetery, in Denver's Windsor neighborhood and has rested in an unmarked plot in Block 51, Lot 26, Section 129 since March 10, 1944, after passing away at 77 years old. William's legacy and his descendants still live on, and it is time to mark his resting place with a headstone and the honor he deserves.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE DENVER CITY COUNCIL:

Section 1. That the Denver City Council recognizes William Henry Whitsell in the 159th year since his birth for his impact on Denver and Colorado.

Section 2. That the Denver City Council recognizes and supports honoring our Black legends, not only when they've passed, but during the vibrancy of their lives and pledges its continued celebration of the impact that Black community leaders have left and will continue to leave on the people of Denver.

Section 3. That the Clerk and Recorder of the City and County of Denver shall affix the seal of the City and County of Denver to this proclamation and transmit a copy to his family members, Janice Ivery, Jerome Carey, Joan Jones, Johnathan Carey, Julius Carey, Julian and Jessie Cary, and Julie Anne Carey.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL February 24, 2025

PRESIDENT