



HR0082

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of
3 Representatives wish to congratulate Mayor Harry "Andy" Ezard
4 and the citizens of Jacksonville on the occasion of its 200th
5 anniversary; and

6 WHEREAS, Jacksonville was platted in March 1825 by
7 surveyor Johnston Shelton, becoming a prairie settlement on a
8 state road running from the Illinois River to Springfield; it
9 was settled by southerners who migrated from Kentucky and
10 Virginia; the settlement grew rapidly with 11 log buildings
11 and a post office within a year of its existence; settlers from
12 New England were drawn to the midwest for its rich, fertile
13 soil in the late 1820s; one of them was a Presbyterian
14 missionary by the name of John Ellis, and he joined a group of
15 theological students from Yale College to found Illinois
16 College, the first college in the young state of Illinois; and

17 WHEREAS, The foundation of Illinois College fostered a
18 sentiment that took root in Jacksonville even before the
19 arrival of higher education; since the 1820s, local
20 organizations that favored abolition were formed; through the
21 influence of such organizations, Jacksonville's reputation as
22 an abolitionist stronghold turned it into a station on the
23 Underground Railroad, helping guide enslaved people to break

1 from their chains and escape to freedom; and

2 WHEREAS, In the early years, transportation was a common
3 inconvenience for settlers; that was until the arrival of the
4 Northern Cross Railroad, the first railroad in Illinois, in
5 1840, and its connection to Springfield two years later
6 signaled social and economic growth in the city throughout the
7 decade; in 1845, the Illinois School for the Deaf opened its
8 doors and became the largest boarding school for deaf students
9 in the world; that same decade, the Illinois School for the
10 Visually Impaired began a similar mission for blind students;
11 the Illinois Conference Female Academy, later renamed
12 MacMurray College, was founded in 1846, while the State's
13 first medical school opened at Illinois College; during this
14 time, local residents planted elm trees that soon towered over
15 the city's streets and provided ample shade, earning
16 Jacksonville the nickname, Elm City; and

17 WHEREAS, By 1860, the population had ballooned to 5,528,
18 and the arrival of two additional rail lines, the Tonica and
19 Petersburg and the Jacksonville, Alton, and St. Louis, brought
20 further growth to the city; Jacob Strawn, the cattle king of
21 Morgan County and one of the richest men in Illinois, spent
22 \$100,000 on a grand, two-story opera house that attracted
23 names such as Mark Twain, Thomas Nast, John Wesley Powell, and
24 Edwin Booth, brother of the assassin of Abraham Lincoln; and

1 WHEREAS, Abraham Lincoln himself had ties to Jacksonville
2 through his legal career and gave a speech in the town square
3 during his 1858 Senate race; three years later as our nation's
4 16th president, Lincoln faced his greatest challenge during
5 the Civil War, which saw 12% of Jacksonville's populace
6 enlisting for military service, mostly for the 10th Illinois
7 Infantry and the 101st Illinois Infantry; one of those men who
8 fought for the Union was General Benjamin Grierson whose
9 cavalry raids through Mississippi achieved national fame;
10 another Union soldier and Illinois resident, then-Col. Ulysses
11 S. Grant, led the 21st Illinois Infantry westward through
12 Jacksonville along State Street, resting briefly at the county
13 fairgrounds, which was the beginning of the young commander's
14 rise; and

15 WHEREAS, In 1867, Jacksonville was incorporated as a city,
16 and its citizens elected John Mathers as its first mayor; and

17 WHEREAS, Following the war, Jacksonville's population
18 boomed, growing to 9,200 by 1870; that growth was also
19 reflected in the city's architecture with a new stone
20 courthouse and many other commercial buildings and churches;
21 the Jacksonville Street Railway Co., incorporated in 1867,
22 provided horse-drawn cars in 1870 before evolving to
23 electrified streetcars in 1892; and

1 WHEREAS, Throughout the latter half of the 19th century,
2 many railways were established and later merged with larger
3 lines, bringing many businesses and industries to the city;
4 planing mills, shirt factories, broom factories, and iron
5 foundries flourished in Jacksonville, among them men's
6 clothing giant J. Capps and Sons, but the city soon became well
7 known for its cigar factories; the L.S. Kent-McCarthy Co.
8 produced roughly six million cigars in 1905, while the
9 McCarthy-Gebert Co. employed 250 cigar rollers, making the
10 owners among the wealthiest in the Morgan County working class
11 before the local industry faded with the rise of the
12 cigarette; and

13 WHEREAS, By 1900, the population had grown to more than
14 15,000; the rise of the automobile in the early 20th century
15 finally brought Jacksonville to the modern age, with State
16 funds used to finance a stretch of concrete pavement on Morton
17 Avenue in 1915; as personal cars became more popular, the need
18 for train lines became less pressing, ultimately ending a long
19 chapter in Jacksonville's storied history; and

20 WHEREAS, In 2009, the citizens of Jacksonville elected
21 Harry "Andy" Ezard as their mayor, and he still serves as mayor
22 to this day; and

1 WHEREAS, In 1975, during its sesquicentennial, or 150th
2 anniversary, Jacksonville buried a time capsule that was
3 donated by the Jacksonville Rotary Club; the capsule currently
4 lies underneath the downtown square, indicated by a stone
5 marker in Central Park's northeast corner that reads, "Our
6 message to the future"; the City of Jacksonville will unearth
7 this time capsule and open it on October 4th, 2025, the last
8 day of a year of celebration for its beloved community's 200th
9 birthday; and

10 WHEREAS, Jacksonville is a beloved community with a very
11 rich history that has had a positive impact on the growth of
12 our great State of Illinois; therefore, be it

13 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
14 HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
15 we congratulate Mayor Ezard, the city council, the City of
16 Jacksonville, and the Jacksonville community on the occasion
17 of its 200th anniversary and acknowledge all of the
18 contributions by its leaders, organizations, and citizens who
19 have positively impacted the community; and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be
21 presented to Mayor Ezard and the leaders of the City of
22 Jacksonville as an expression of our respect and esteem for a
23 storied 200-year history and for being a pivotal community in

1 our State and nation's past.