



HR0490

LRB104 15615 MST 28782 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, Lewis E. Isbell was born into slavery in Floyd County, Kentucky on March 17, 1819, was emancipated in 1825, and was an early settler in Edgar County, where he lived from 1825 until 1838; and

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WHEREAS, Lewis Isbell traveled to Chicago in 1838 as an early pioneer and was one of the first Black residents after Jean Baptiste du Sable; he became the second barber in the city, establishing what he said was "the biggest and the best" in Chicago; and

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WHEREAS, Becoming a prominent barber in Chicago, Lewis Isbell operated his shop at the prestigious Sherman House Hotel for 25 years, shaving many prominent men throughout his career, including Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, United States Senator Stephen Douglas, and Chicago Mayors William B. Ogden, John Wentworth, and John P. Hopkins; and

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WHEREAS, Lewis Isbell continued his trade as the "Dean of Chicago Barbers" for well over 50 years and was recognized by the American Barbers Association; and

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WHEREAS, Lewis Isbell would try his success at other

1 passions of his as well, becoming a photographer, community
2 leader, and later owning a dining room; and

3 WHEREAS, On July 4, 1847, Lewis Isbell gained extensive
4 notoriety for his victory in a three-way foot race at
5 Merrick's Racetrack between a Native American, a man on
6 horseback, and himself; and

7 WHEREAS, Lewis Isbell joined the American Anti-Slavery
8 Society in 1839 and quickly became a force in assisting
9 freedom seekers, fighting for the abolition of slavery, the
10 repeal of Illinois' Black Laws, and broad Black equality,
11 later representing Cook County at the 1850, 1853, and 1856
12 Illinois "Colored Conventions"; and

13 WHEREAS, A member, conductor, and one of the leaders of
14 the Chicago Underground Railroad, Lewis Isbell used his
15 extensive networks and ties to prominent businessmen to
16 successfully transport nearly 1,000 freedom seekers through
17 Chicago and onto Canada; and

18 WHEREAS, Lewis Isbell was nearly killed by a slave hunter
19 in 1857 after refusing to disclose the location of freedom
20 seekers in Chicago, leading the slaver to draw his revolver
21 and fire four shots, all of which missed; and

1 WHEREAS, In 1863, upon the personal recommendation of
2 Chicago Tribune owner Joseph Medill and then-Governor Richard
3 Yates, Lewis Isbell was commissioned by Secretary of War Edwin
4 Stanton to serve as a general recruiting officer of "colored
5 troops" in Illinois and Wisconsin during the Civil War,
6 ultimately recruiting for the 29th Regiment; and

7 WHEREAS, Hailed as a "great unknown Chicagoan", Lewis
8 Isbell died in Chicago on October 13, 1905 and was buried in a
9 still-unmarked grave at Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery;
10 therefore, be it

11 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
12 HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
13 we declare October 13, 2025 as Lewis Isbell Day in the State of
14 Illinois.