

HR 1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Rules

Prepared By: Melissa Leoni, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 2/19, 2/26

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure recognizes and honors Louis Southworth for his industriousness, his perseverance in the face of adversity, and his remarkable contributions to the State of Oregon.

Fiscal impact: No fiscal impact

Revenue impact: No revenue impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Learning about Louis Southworth and his contributions through celebrations for him in Waldport

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Louis Southworth was born into slavery in Tennessee on July 4, 1830. Louis Southworth and his mother, Pauline, were brought to Oregon in 1853 by their owner, James Southworth, during a time in the state's history when Black people were not allowed to settle on their own.

Louis Southworth was an avid hunter and a skilled marksman who built his own rifle, which he used to hunt deer, elk and bear, and later employed in the service of Colonel John Kelsay's Second Regiment volunteers in the Rogue River Wars around 1856. He was a man of tremendous spirit and industriousness, an accomplished gold prospector and a talented fiddler.

By 1858, Louis Southworth had earned the \$1,000 (nearly \$38,500 in 2024) necessary to purchase his freedom by prospecting in southern Oregon and northern California and playing the fiddle at dance schools in Yreka, California.

By 1870, Louis Southworth, as a free man, returned to Oregon and took up residence in Buena Vista, purchasing land and opening a blacksmith shop and livery stable. On June 16, 1873, Louis Southworth married Mary Cooper in Salem, and became the stepfather to her adopted son, Alvin McCleary, soon learning to read and write at the same school that Alvin attended.

In 1879, Louis Southworth built a homestead on the upper Alsea Bay just outside of Waldport, where he quickly became an integral and beloved part of the community, operating a ferry on the Alsea River and playing his fiddle at civic events. From 1880 to 1885, Louis Southworth worked tirelessly to improve his family homestead, utilizing animal power and a wooden plough to cultivate the land at the indefatigable pace of 10 to 12 acres per year.

Louis Southworth had tremendous respect for education, generously donating half an acre of his family homestead for Waldport's first school and serving on the school's board. Louis Southworth proudly and infamously rowed across Alsea Bay in a storm to cast his vote in the election of 1880.

Louis Southworth lived in Oregon during a period in which the state's exclusion laws made it nearly impossible for Black Oregonians to thrive, but after achieving his freedom, he built a life of prosperity for his family that would not have been possible during his days of servitude.

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After Louis Southworth passed away on June 28, 1917, he was buried at the Crystal Lake Cemetery in Corvallis, where the epitaph on his gravestone read: "A bit of heaven's music here below."

On November 19, 2022, the city of Waldport dedicated to Louis Southworth's memory a bronze statue depicting him playing his beloved fiddle. It was put on display at the Historic Alsea Bay Interpretive Center in 2023, where it will remain until it can be moved to its final home in Louis Southworth Park, further celebrating his joyful spirit and cementing his unique importance to the community of Waldport and the history of the State of Oregon.