

City Council

Motion without Notice

MM47.103	ACTION			Ward: 10
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Authorization to Release Section 16 funds to fund the Production and Installation of three Heritage Plaques to Commemorate John M Tinsley, Peggy, and James Mink - by Councillor Joe Mihevc, seconded by Councillor Robin Buxton Potts

** This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.*

** This Motion is not subject to a vote to waive referral. This Motion has been added to the agenda and is before Council for debate.*

Recommendations

Councillor Joe Mihevc, seconded by Councillor Robin Buxton Potts, recommends that:

1. City Council increase the 2022 Council Approved Operating Budget for Heritage Toronto on a one-time basis by \$22,500.00 gross, \$0 net, fully funded by Section 16 community benefits obtained from the development at 15 York Street, (Source Account: XR3031), for the production and installation of 3 heritage plaques to recognize "John M Tinsley", "Peggy" and "James Mink" (Cost Centre: HG0001).

Summary

This Motion seeks authorization to release \$22,500 in Section 16 funds to Heritage Toronto for the creation and installation of three heritage plaques to recognize John M Tinsley, Peggy, and James Mink, persons of historic significance identified through research by Ontario Black History Society and Heritage Toronto.

John Tinsley

John Tinsley (1782-1892) was born a free Black man in Richmond, Virginia. He trained as a carpenter and millwright and came to Canada in 1842.

In Toronto, Tinsley was a building contractor and he ran a successful construction company. Tinsley would often hire and provide vital paid work to newcomers to Canada who arrived via the Underground Railroad, the secret network of travel routes that allowed enslaved people to find comparative freedom in the northern United States and Canada.

He was a prominent member of Toronto's Black community. He was an active member of the First Baptist Church, located at Queen and Victoria Streets. The church was the first Baptist congregation in Toronto and one of the oldest Black institutions in the city. Many people connected to the Underground Railroad and abolitionist movement were members of the church.

Tinsley worked into his 90s and died in Toronto at his home on Agnes Street (now part of Dundas Street). He is buried in Toronto's Necropolis.

Peggy

Peggy was a Black woman enslaved in Toronto during the 1790s and into the 1800s by Peter Russell, Receiver General of Upper Canada, and his sister Elizabeth at their property "Russell Abbey", located at the corner of Sherbourne and Front Streets.

In addition to Peggy, the Russells also enslaved three of Peggy's children: Jupiter, Amy, and Milly. Peggy's husband, a man named Pompador, arrived in Canada via the Underground Railroad and was employed by the Russells, but not enslaved.

Peggy's tasks included cooking, washing laundry, and making soap and candles. Around 1800, the Russells attempted to sell Peggy, posting advertisements in newspapers. In letters, Elizabeth Russell complained that Peggy was increasingly disobedient, which was likely a deliberate form of resistance against the Russells and her enslavement.

Peggy later managed to emancipate herself from the Russells without their permission. In response, Russell posted derogatory notices about Peggy in the Upper Canada Gazette and threatened anyone who employed her without his permission with legal action.

James Mink

James Mink (c1792-1868) was a Black businessman and one of the wealthiest people in Toronto during the 1830s until his death.

He was the son of Tobe and Eve Mink, two people enslaved by Johan Herkimer, who moved to Kingston after the Civil War. James was born between 1792 and 1795 in Upper Canada. Very little is known about his childhood and when he obtained his freedom.

Mink became a successful businessman. He moved to Toronto in the 1840s, while George, his brother, stayed in Kingston. They received government contracts to deliver mail, passengers, and prisoners between Toronto and Kingston.

James owned several other businesses. He ran a hotel in the York and Richmond area and a livery stable on King Street West between Bay and Yonge Streets. Around 1850, he combined the businesses to form the Mansion House Inn and Livery Stable at 21 Adelaide Street East.

Through all his business endeavours, James Mink became extremely wealthy and he was an active member of the Black community in 19th-century Toronto. His inn was used as a polling station in elections. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had a daughter, Mary Mink.

Unfortunately, the Mink family name is associated with a longstanding racist myth. It was misreported that James Mink had published an advertisement seeking a white husband for his daughter, Mary ("Minnie"). The myth follows that a man replied, married Mary, and sold her into slavery in the United States requiring James to pay a large ransom to secure her freedom.

In reality, Mary Mink married William Johnson, a Black man, in Toronto in 1852 and continued to live in the city. Rebuttals printed in major newspapers lacked the reach of the original story and the myth of James and his daughter Mary is still sometimes circulated today. James Mink retired to Richmond Hill and died in 1868. He is buried in Toronto's Necropolis.

This motion is urgent as the manufacturing of the commemorative plaques needs to take place in 2022.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM47.103