

HR 2 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Rules

Prepared By: Melissa Leoni, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 2/19

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure recognizes and honors Reuben Shipley for his remarkable life and his incomparable contributions to the State of Oregon.

Fiscal impact: No fiscal impact

Revenue impact: No revenue impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Reuben Shipley was born into slavery in Kentucky in the early 1800s. As was customary at the time, Reuben Shipley was given the surname of his owner, Robert Shipley. When the Shipley family moved to Missouri, Reuben Shipley rose in prominence to manage the affairs of the Shipleys' plantation. While in Missouri, Reuben Shipley became a husband and a father to two boys, but his wife and children were enslaved on another plantation 30 miles away, and he was only granted leave to visit them once a month.

During the time of his enslavement to Robert Shipley, Reuben Shipley developed a close friendship with Robert Shipley, Jr., and the elder Robert bequeathed ownership of Reuben to the younger Robert, vowing that the two friends would never be separated. Following the death of Robert Shipley, Robert Shipley, Jr., made plans to move his family to Oregon, and though he wanted Reuben Shipley to remain with them, Robert promised Reuben his freedom in exchange for his help building a new homestead in Oregon.

Reuben Shipley did not want to leave his wife and sons behind in Missouri, but he accepted Robert Shipley's offer with the intention of purchasing his family's freedom after he achieved liberty for himself, and in the spring of 1853, the Shipleys began the arduous journey westward along the Oregon Trail.

In the fall of 1853, with work completed on the Shipleys' Oregon homestead, Robert Shipley fulfilled his promise, and Reuben Shipley was granted his freedom. Now that he was a free man, Reuben Shipley immediately went to work in Oregon to earn the money to purchase his family's freedom, but after he saved the necessary amount, he learned that his wife had died, and her owner refused to relinquish ownership of Reuben's sons.

Despite his unimaginable grief over the loss of his family, Reuben Shipley resolved to carry on, setting up a homestead of his own and making a new life in Oregon. Reuben Shipley's superior skills and unimpeachable work ethic put him in great demand as a laborer, allowing him to command the highest wages of the day, and within a few years he was able to purchase 101 acres of the Charles Bales' Donation Land Claim near Philomath, Oregon, upon which he built his homestead.

In 1857, Reuben Shipley met Mary Jane Holmes, a young woman who remained enslaved despite the rest of her family having been liberated by the Territorial Supreme Court in 1853 in the first-ever slavery trial held in Oregon. Reuben Shipley and Mary Jane Holmes were married in Polk County that year, but Nathaniel Ford, Mary Jane's enslaver, refused to allow her to leave his property until Reuben paid a ransom of approximately \$700, which

HR 2 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Reuben promptly agreed to do.

After Mary Jane Holmes Shipley gained her freedom, Reuben Shipley and Mary Jane had six children and became prosperous landowners, respected members of the Philomath community, and schoolteachers to their children and their neighbors' children.

On May 1, 1861, Reuben Shipley and Mary Jane Holmes Shipley donated three acres of their land for the creation of the Mt. Union Cemetery, which was one of the first cemeteries in the country that allowed Black people and people of other races to be buried alongside each other. Reuben Shipley died on September 25, 1872, and was laid to rest in the cemetery he had founded. Ultimately, Mary Jane Holmes Shipley and the children were themselves laid to rest in Mt. Union Cemetery.

Reuben Shipley's pioneering efforts helped shaped Oregon's future growth into a land of inclusivity.