2019 ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

Relating to: proclaiming February 2020 as Black History Month.

Whereas, Americans have recognized Black History Month annually since February 1926; and

Whereas, central to black history in Wisconsin is the state’s Underground Railroad, the antislavery runaway network, through which more than 100 slaves escaped to freedom in Canada between 1842 and 1861; and

Whereas, the fugitive enslaved people who utilized Wisconsin’s Underground Railroad, as well as the abolitionists who provided them with shelter and passage across the state, exhibited exceptional courage and conviction; and

Whereas, in 1842, Caroline Quarlls, the first person known to have utilized the state’s Underground Railroad, escaped from her owner in St. Louis before traveling north to Wisconsin, where African American and white abolitionists hid her in safe houses located in Milwaukee, Pewaukee, Prairieville (now Waukesha), and Spring Prairie; and
Whereas, Lyman Goodnow, a church deacon and abolitionist from Prairieville, drove Quarlls, hidden in the back of a wagon, from Wisconsin to Michigan, where he and other freedom workers hired a ferry to carry Quarlls across the Detroit River to Canada; and

Whereas, Dr. Edward Galusha Dyer not only hid runaways in his home in Burlington but also openly campaigned against slavery and collected money to help Quarlls and Goodnow; and

Whereas, Joshua Glover escaped from slavery in Missouri and worked at a mill in Racine for two years before a U.S. marshal, accompanied by Glover's former enslaver, arrested him in 1854 and transported him to a jail in Milwaukee, where he escaped and eventually slipped onto steamship bound for Canada; and

Whereas, Sherman Booth, editor of the Wisconsin Freeman, a Milwaukee-based abolitionist newspaper, was convicted of breaking the Fugitive Slave Act for his part in recruiting hundreds of people to storm the jail where Glover was detained to help him break free; and

Whereas, members of the Stockbridge-Munsee band of Mohican Indians helped numerous enslaved people on their journey to freedom, including a father and three children whom the Stockbridge-Munsee hid from bounty hunters on their land near Lake Winnebago around 1854; and

Whereas, Eliza Chappell Porter, the wife of a minister in Green Bay, received word from the Stockbridge-Munsee that the family was ready to travel on to her parsonage, the last stop on Wisconsin's Underground Railroad for fugitive slaves waiting to depart from the city's harbor, and kept the family hidden in the church's bell tower until their ship to Canada was ready to depart; and
Whereas, Joseph Goodrich, a pioneer and abolitionist, dug a tunnel between his inn in Milton and a log cabin nearby so fugitive slaves could secretly pass from the cabin to the inn’s cellar, where he and his wife, Nancy, provided them with food and shelter; and

Whereas, Andrew Pratt, a fugitive slave who hid in Milton House in 1861, found work as a farmhand with help from Goodrich and eventually became a homesteader and respected community member in Milton; and

Whereas, during the Civil War, Colonel William Utley, a leader of the 22nd Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment, helped several people escape from slavery in Kentucky, including one young woman secreted out of the 22nd’s base camp while she was dressed as a soldier; and

Whereas, Ezekiel Gillespie purchased his own freedom for $800, opened a grocery store in Milwaukee in 1854, operated a busy local branch of the Underground Railroad, and won a landmark case in 1866 that secured African Americans’ right to vote in Wisconsin; and

Whereas, the trust, bravery, and resourcefulness of citizens who utilized and operated the Underground Railroad in Wisconsin and elsewhere inspires us to fight racism today; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the assembly, That the month of February 2020 shall be designated as Black History Month.

(END)