

Proclamation

LIBBA COTTEN DAY

WHEREAS, Elizabeth “Libba” Cotten was born to George and Louisa Nevill on January 5, 1893, in Orange County, North Carolina, in an area later incorporated as part of Carrboro; she grew up in a family surrounded by music near the railroad tracks on what is now Lloyd Street; and

WHEREAS, by the time she was a teenager, Libba Cotten composed “Freight Train,” which would become her most famous song and would inspire generations of musicians; and

WHEREAS, Libba Cotten released her first album, *Elizabeth Cotten: Negro Folk Songs and Tunes*, on Folkways Records in 1958; and

WHEREAS, by the 1960s, she began performing publicly and became a key figure in the American folk music revival, performing at national festivals, including the Philadelphia Folk Festival, the Newport Folk Festival, and the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklore; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, Libba Cotten was presented with the National Folk Association’s Burl Ives Award for her contributions to folk music; and

WHEREAS, in 1984, Libba Cotten was made a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts and, in the same year, won the Grammy Award for Best Ethnic or Traditional Recording for her album *Elizabeth Cotten Live*; and

WHEREAS, in 1989, Libba Cotten was included as one of 75 influential African American women in Brian Lanker’s documentary photo collection, *I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, Libba Cotten was posthumously inducted into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Carrboro named its downtown multi-use path along the railroad the “Libba Cotten Bikeway,” a vital link between Carrboro and Chapel Hill for hundreds of people every day; and

WHEREAS, since 2015, the Town has partnered with the Music Maker Relief Foundation in hosting the Freight Train Blues concert series to honor Libba Cotten and her contributions to blues music; and

WHEREAS, from 2017 to 2019, the Town partnered with Prof. Cecelia Conway of Appalachian State University, through the Our Town grants program of the National Endowment for the Arts, to celebrate Libba Cotten with concerts that honor Black and global banjo and roots music; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the Town partnered with the North Carolina Musician Murals Project and the Town of Chapel Hill to celebrate Libba Cotten in a mural created by artist Scott Nurkin at 111 N. Merritt Mill Road in Carrboro;

WHEREAS, Libba Cotten continues to inspire musicians around the world and occupies a special place in Carrboro's history and our vibrant and enduring local music culture.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Barbara M. Foushee, mayor of the Town of Carrboro, North Carolina, do hereby proclaim January 5, 2024, to be "Libba Cotten Day" in Carrboro and encourage all residents to celebrate the life and legacy of Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten and her important contributions to folk and blues music, to our local history, and to our collective Americana.

This the 20th day of December, 2023.


Barbara M. Foushee

