

Proclamation

ELIZABETH “LIBBA” COTTEN DAY

WHEREAS, Elizabeth 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, at twelve years old, Elizabeth Cotten composed “Freight Train”, this composition not only defined her musical legacy but also inspired generations of artists, cementing her place as a pivotal figure in American folk music;

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

WHEREAS, in 1984, Elizabeth 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 1987, Elizabeth Cotten was posthumously Grammy nominated for Best Traditional Folk Recording 20th Anniversary Concert (shared by Pete Seeger); and

WHEREAS, in 1989, Elizabeth 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 2007, Elizabeth Cotten’s album *Folksongs and Instruments with Guitar*, featuring “Freight Train” was added to the Library of Congress’s National Recording Registry for being “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, Elizabeth 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, in 2013, a NC State Historical Marker was dedicated at the intersection of East Main and Roberson Streets, which marks her birthplace and commemorates her contributions to music; and

WHEREAS, since 2015, the Town has partnered with the Music Maker Relief Foundation in hosting

the Freight Train Blues concert series to honor Elizabeth 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 Elizabeth 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 Elizabeth Cotten in a mural created by artist Scott Nurkin at 111 N. Merritt Mill Road in Carrboro;

WHEREAS, in 2022, Elizabeth Cotten was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as an American Folk treasure where her warm and intimate recordings, live performances, inspired guitar prowess, and musical inventiveness influenced countless other musicians; and

WHEREAS, Elizabeth 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, 2026, to be "Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten Day" in Carrboro and encourage all residents to celebrate the life and legacy of Elizabeth Cotten and her important contributions to folk and blues music, to our local history, and to our collective Americana.

This the 5th day of January, 2026.


Barbara M. Foushee

