

JOINT RESOLUTIONS

Signed May 14, 1987.

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No. 7

(House Joint Resolution No. 6)

A House Joint Resolution concerning

Thomas Kennedy Commemoration - Artistic Competition

FOR the purpose of requesting a statewide artistic competition to create an appropriate commemoration for Thomas Kennedy, who in the early 19th century fought for eight years in the General Assembly to win religious freedom for Jews in Maryland, who were barred from holding public office in the State.

WHEREAS, Until 1826 the Constitution of Maryland required citizens of Jewish origin to subscribe to a Christian oath in order to hold public office in this State; and

WHEREAS, This injustice and infringement upon religious liberty was ended by an Act of the General Assembly passed January 26, 1826; and

WHEREAS, That Act was championed by Thomas Kennedy, of Washington County (1776-1832), who served in the House of Delegates and the Senate of Maryland; and

WHEREAS, In 1818, as a first term delegate, Thomas Kennedy presented a resolution calling for the appointment of a committee to consider "placing the Jewish inhabitants on an equal footing with the Christians", and argued forcefully and eloquently for the principle of religious freedom; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Kennedy was a Scottish-born Presbyterian who never met a Jew in his life, but took up their cause out of a passion for liberty and justice exemplified in his political career; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Kennedy continued to advocate the abolition of the oath after his legislation was twice defeated in the General Assembly, to the point where his bill, called the "Jew bill" by his opponents, became the focal point of his reelection in 1823; and subjected him to personal attacks by his opponents, who called him "an enemy of Christianity" and "a Judas Iscariot", which led to his defeat; and

WHEREAS, Delegate Kennedy did not relent, but continued his battle, and was returned to the House of Delegates in 1825 1825