



## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Pat Heiden, Chairperson  
Royceann Porter, Vice Chairperson

Jon Green  
Lisa Green-Douglass  
Rod Sullivan

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Thursday, June 24, 2021

For immediate release

### **Lulu Merle Johnson recognized as official eponym of Johnson County**

**Johnson County, Iowa** – The Johnson County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously today, Thursday, June 24, 2021, to recognize Lulu Merle Johnson as the official eponym of Johnson County.

Lulu Merle Johnson was born in 1907 in Gravity, Iowa, to a father who was born into slavery. She became a student at the State University of Iowa (University of Iowa) in 1925 at a time when she was one of only 14 African-American women enrolled at the university. She earned both a bachelor's and master's degree by 1930, despite facing open discrimination because of her race and gender.

From 1931 to 1941, Lulu Merle Johnson was a professor at the State University of Iowa while working toward her Ph.D. In 1941, she became the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. from the University. From 1931 until her retirement in 1971, she maintained an active career as a professor and academic. She taught history at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and was the Dean of Women at Cheyney State University (Cheyney University) in Cheyney, Pennsylvania.

"Today was touching and I am so happy," Royceann Porter, Board of Supervisors Vice-Chairperson, said. "It was amazing to include Lulu Merle Johnson's family in the recognition. I look forward to taking students to Gravity for the annual civil rights trip so they can learn more about her legacy."

Johnson County was originally named after Richard Mentor Johnson by the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature in 1837. Richard Mentor Johnson was a slave owner for his entire life, and took credit for killing Shawnee Chief Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames in 1805.

“We recognize that place names embody the identity and cultural values of a place. For that reason, it is important to establish an eponym of Johnson County who represents what is important to the people who live here,” Lisa Green-Douglass, Board of Supervisors member, said. “It has been a privilege to chair the Johnson County Eponym Committee, and to be able to recognize, honor, and establish Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson as the County’s official eponym.”

The signed resolution follows.

-END-

**RESOLUTION NO. 06-24-21-02**  
**RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING LULU MERLE JOHNSON**  
**AS THE OFFICIAL EPONYM OF JOHNSON COUNTY, IOWA**

Whereas, the people of Johnson County acknowledge that names carry power and believe the county eponym should be a person who both embodies their sense of values, ideals, and morals, and has a personal connection to Johnson County and the State of Iowa; and

Whereas, the County of Johnson in the State of Iowa was originally named after Richard Mentor Johnson, a lifelong Kentuckian with no known personal connections to either Johnson County or the State of Iowa, by the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature in 1837; and

Whereas, Richard Mentor Johnson took credit for killing the legendary Shawnee Chief Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames in 1805, and then later in his life used this fact for his political gain; and

Whereas, Richard Mentor Johnson was a lifelong slave owner who was known for using his position as such to engage in coercive relationships with his slaves; and

Whereas, Richard Mentor Johnson does not embody the values, ideals, and morals of the people of Johnson County; and

Whereas, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors is committed to rectifying systemic racism and institutional inequity, including removing names and monuments that memorialize or honor a person who has perpetuated violence against Black people, Indigenous people, and other nonwhite people, or a cause that is manifestly unjust; and

Whereas, the people of Johnson County believe that the institution of slavery was and is a grave injustice against humanity; and

Whereas, the people of Johnson County wholeheartedly believe that, as is reflected in the Iowa Constitution, all persons are “by nature, free and equal,” and that all persons have the inalienable right to enjoy their liberty and pursue their happiness; and

Whereas, it is the aim of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors to educate its residents through the recognition of esteemed state and local heroes, places, and concepts that uphold the honorable ideals of liberty, democracy, and self-determination; and

Whereas, Lulu Merle Johnson was born in 1907 in the City of Gravity, State of Iowa, to parents who were born into slavery; and

Whereas, Lulu Merle Johnson entered the State University of Iowa in 1925, at a time when she was 1 of only 14 African-American women enrolled at the university; and

Whereas, Lulu Merle Johnson, despite facing open discrimination based on her status as an African-American woman, completed both bachelor’s and master’s degrees by 1930; and

Whereas, Lulu Merle Johnson, in 1931, while also maintaining a career as a professor, began studies toward her Doctor of Philosophy degree at the State University of Iowa, and, in 1941, became the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. from that institution; and

Whereas, Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson, from 1931 until her retirement in 1971, maintained an active career as an academic and college professor, teaching history at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and rising through the ranks to become the Dean of Women at Cheyney State University; and

Whereas, Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson is recognized by the University of Iowa Graduate College for her role as a trailblazing academic through its establishment of the Lulu Merle Johnson Recruitment Fellowship to recruit talented doctoral students from underrepresented minority groups; and

Whereas, Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson, a vibrant person and accomplished academic with strong connections to the State of Iowa and Johnson County, through her determination to succeed despite discrimination and adversity, embodied the values, ideals, and morals which the people of Johnson County strive to preserve and uphold.

Now, Therefore, be it resolved that we, the Board of Supervisors of Johnson County, Iowa, shall henceforth recognize as its official eponym Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson, an inspirational woman whose story of accomplishment in the face of adversity is one of which the citizens of Johnson County can be proud for generations to come.

It was moved by Porter and seconded by Sullivan the Resolution be adopted this 24 day of June, 2021.

**Roll Call:** Green Aye Green-Douglass Aye Heiden Aye Porter Aye Sullivan Aye

  
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Pat Heiden, Chairperson  
Board of Supervisors  
6/24/21  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

ATTEST:

  
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Travis Weipert, Auditor  
Johnson County, Iowa  
Deputy