

~~BRUSH STREET~~ BLACKBURN STREET

“THERE IS CURRENTLY NO HISTORICAL MARKER ACKNOWLEDGING SLAVERY IN DETROIT – REVEALING THAT PEOPLE WERE BOUGHT, SOLD, AND HELD AS PROPERTY THERE... DETROIT WAS A PLACE THAT SAW UNCONSCIONABLE BONDAGE, ELICITED INVENTIVE BIDS FOR FREEDOM, AND SHAPED LIVES NOT DEVOID OF HEROISM.”
- THE DAWN OF DETROIT BY TIYA MILES

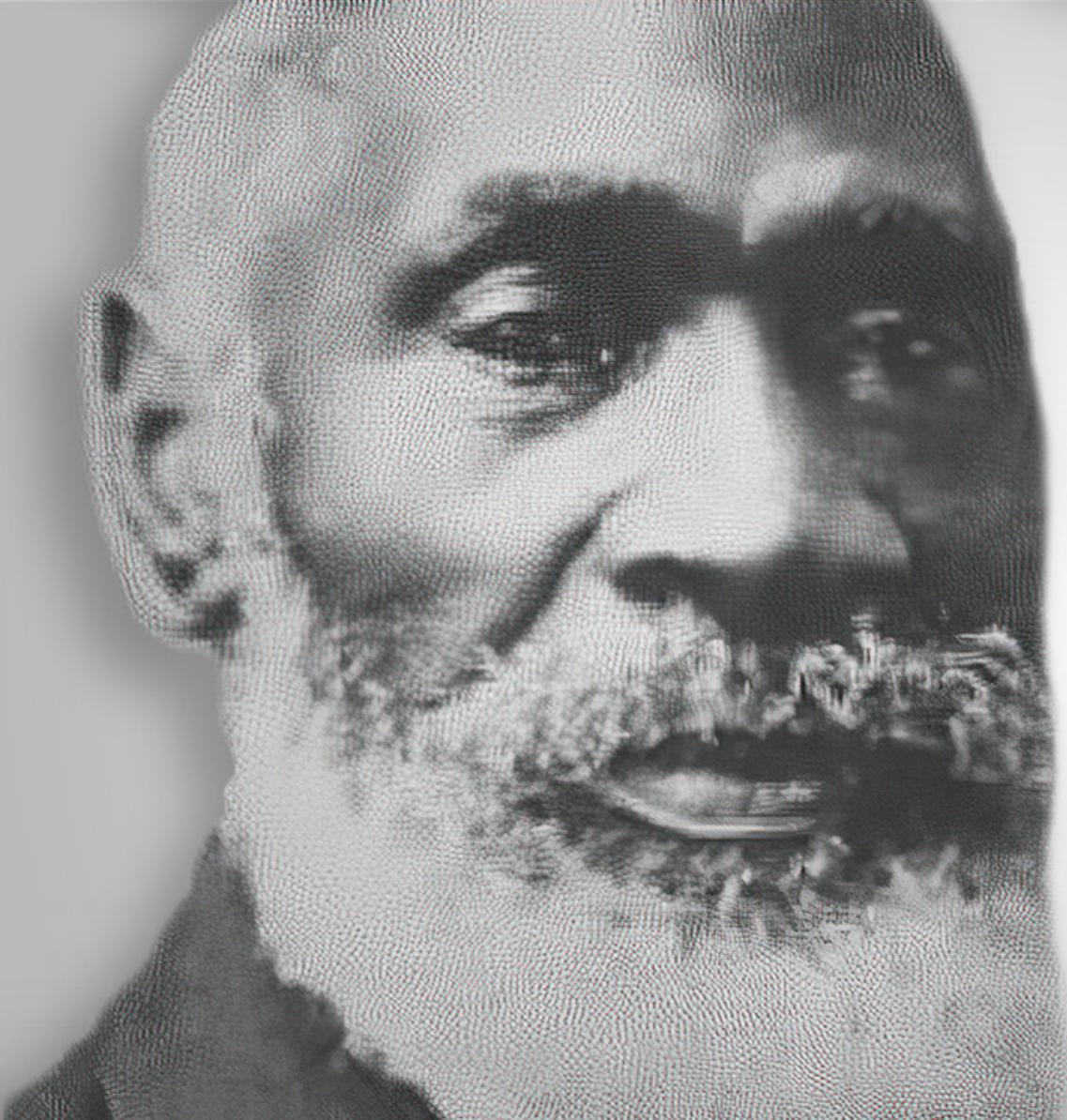
SECOND MAYOR OF DETROIT AND ENSLAVER ELIJAH BRUSH IS TO THIS DAY HONORED BY HAVING A STREET NAMED AFTER HIM. BUT DOES HE REALLY DESERVE THAT HONOR?

THORNTON AND LUCIE BLACKBURN:

- WERE ENSLAVED SEVERAL TIMES WHILE FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM.
- THE FIRST RACIAL PROTEST IN DETROIT, THE BLACKBURN UPRISING, WERE DEDICATED TO THE RELEASE OF THE COUPLE FROM JAIL.
- ONCE FREED, THEY AIDED MANY MORE OF THOSE ENSLAVED BY OFFERING THEIR LAND TO THE UNDERGROUND RAILROADS .

AFTER ALL OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS, THE BLACKBURNS HAVE YET TO RECEIVE RECOGNITION IN DETROIT.

IF YOU BELIEVE BRUSH STREET SHOULD BE RENAMED BLACKBURN STREET, SCAN THE CODE TO LEARN MORE.



Renaming Brush Street

The city of Detroit today sits in remembrance of popular enslavers, including, but not limited to, the Brush family, through architecture, signs, and other objects. As one learns about the history of Detroit, names cannot be found for influential people of color such as the Blackburn couple, or the Denison family. In erasing these stories, all that is left behind are memories of authority that controlled bodies.

Currently, Brush Street is named after a family of enslavers. Although many people remember Elijah Brush for his position as second mayor, a lawyer, and an attorney general, many fail to address how prominent he and his family were in the world of slavery. We propose that this street be renamed to highlight some of the people that the Brush family silenced: Thornton and Lucie (Rutha) Blackburn. The Blackburns, husband and wife, were runaway slaves from Louisville, Kentucky who repeatedly escaped and were caught again. Thornton and Lucie were caught and arrested in Detroit in 1833 and news of this ignited the “Blackburn Riots¹” which has been named Detroit's first racial protest, dedicated to the couple’s release from jail. Although a significant moment in history, many people do not know of this event, let alone how important it was to those enslaved. These freedom seekers, the Blackburns, eventually managed to obtain their goal by fleeing to Canada where they lived as anti-slavery activists and were well-respected citizens of their community. After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, more and more slaves fled to Canada in search of freedom. The Blackburn’s former property was the first Underground Railroad site to ever be dug in Canada and was found by archaeologists in 1985.

Street signs serve as a memory of the past. Right now, enslavers’ names are infiltrating the Detroit area and have erased the important stories of people like the Blackburns. These landmarks do not need to be engraved in the city forever, and it is time to remember the stories of those that have been silenced for so long. By changing the street name from Brush to Blackburn, communities can learn the history of Detroit through a new lens, understanding Detroit’s participation in enslavement and how the Blackburns and other black families fought back against slavery, rather than remembering Elijah Brush through the masked identity of the second mayor of Detroit and a popular attorney.

¹ Although this event has been labeled a “riot” and “protest” a word that may define it more appropriately is “uprising.” This is because the words “riot” and “protest” often have a very negative connotation. Though violence occurred at this event, that was not its intention, rather people were advocating for their rights and for freedom.