



Resolution Creating a Celebration Day for Walter Harper and John Fredson

Whereas, John Fredson, Neets' aii Gwich'in Athabascan, was born in Venetie, Alaska in 1896, learned English at an Episcopal mission school, and became highly skilled in following trails, climbing and hunting from a young age; and

Whereas, at the age of 16, Fredson served as base camp manager for the first recorded ascent of Denali, in 1913, and was afterwards sponsored by expedition leader and Episcopal Archdeacon Hudson Stuck to attend college at the Episcopal University of the South (Sewanee); and

Whereas, Fredson worked with linguist John Sapir while at Sewanee, helping to classify Gwich'in within the Na-Dene language family, and is believed to be the first Alaska Native to graduate from a university; and

Whereas, John Fredson returned to Alaska after his graduation, worked in a hospital in Fort Yukon and taught school in Venetie, and, in 1941, was instrumental in securing the Gwich'in people over 1.4 million acres of tribal land for Venetie and Arctic Village; and

Whereas, Walter Harper was born in Tanana, Alaska in December 1892, the youngest child of a Koyukon Athabascan mother and an Irish father, and his integration into his father's Western culture without forfeiting an ounce of his mother's Athabascan heritage serves as a beacon to Alaska Native and other Indigenous youth the world over; and

Whereas, at age 17 Harper became riverboat pilot, winter trail guide, and interpreter to Archdeacon Hudson Stuck as he traveled throughout Alaska's Interior as a missionary; and

Whereas, Walter Harper became, on June 7, 1913, the first person to reach the summit of Denali, in the expedition led by Stuck; and

Whereas, Walter Harper died tragically at the age of 25 while traveling to attend medical school, after which he planned to return to Alaska and serve his people as a medical missionary, when the steamer Princess Sophia ran aground in the Lynn Canal on October 25th, 1918, denying Alaska the legacy of a respected Alaska Native Elder a full life would surely have provided; and

Whereas, in 2020 the State of Alaska established June 7 of each year as Walter Harper Day; and

Whereas, John Fredson and Walter Harper to this day inspire youth across Alaska to strive to live as they did – with courage, integrity, and a strong sense of purpose:



49th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska
Resolution #2024-02

Be it therefore resolved, that, pending the approval of the tribal councils of Arctic Village, Venetie, and Tanana, the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska recognize Koyukon Athabascan Walter Harper and Neets'aiti Gwich'in John Fredson as revered historical and spiritual figures in Alaska, especially among Indigenous communities; and

Be it further resolved, that the congregations of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska are urged to include a celebration and prayer for Walter Harper and John Fredson on the Sunday closest to June 7th; and

Be it further resolved, that the Bishop and the Diocesan Deputies to General Convention petition for the inclusion of the celebration of Walter Harper and John Fredson, devoted servants of Jesus Christ, on the Liturgical Calendar of the Episcopal Church at the 2027 General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

The Lessons Appointed for Use at this Celebration:

Psalm 23
Isaiah 11:1-9
Colossians 3:23-24
Mark 10:41-45

Respectfully submitted by,

The Resolution Committee, 49th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska