

House Resolution 950

By: Representative Greene of the 151st

A RESOLUTION

- 1 Honoring the life and memory of Lena Baker; and for other purposes.
- 2 WHEREAS, the State of Georgia continues to mourn the loss of Lena Baker, born June 8,
3 1900, near Cuthbert, Georgia, in the community of Cotton Hill where her family worked as
4 farmers; and
- 5 WHEREAS, this African American mother of three, who worked as a maid to support her
6 children, was executed at Reidsville State Prison on March 5, 1945, after being convicted of
7 murdering her white employer during an attempt to defend her own life and liberty; and
- 8 WHEREAS, on April 29, 1944, Lena Baker was forced from her home by Ernest B. Knight
9 and held against her will at the gristmill he owned; and
- 10 WHEREAS, fearing for her life, Lena Baker attempted to leave and the two fought over a
11 pistol; during the struggle the gun went off, killing her assailant; and
- 12 WHEREAS, her trial convened on August 14, 1944, at the Randolph County courthouse,
13 which was then presided over by Judge Charles William "Two Gun" Worrill, so named
14 because he kept two pistols in view on the bench; and
- 15 WHEREAS, despite testifying to being sexually abused by her employer, a fact that was
16 known in the community, an all-white, all-male jury rejected Lena's plea of self-defense and
17 convicted her of capital murder after a trial and deliberation lasting less than four hours; and
- 18 WHEREAS, after being denied clemency by the State Board of Pardons and Paroles in early
19 1945, Lena Baker was executed by the state, becoming the only woman to be executed by
20 electrocution in the State of Georgia; and

21 WHEREAS, after her death, Lena Baker was buried at Mount Vernon Baptist Church in
22 Cuthbert, where she had sung in the choir, in a grave that went unmarked for five decades
23 until the congregation raised enough money for a marker; and

24 WHEREAS, in 2005, the State Board of Pardons and Paroles granted Lena Baker a full and
25 unconditional pardon; and

26 WHEREAS, in her honor, a professor at Andrew College published a 2001 biography that
27 was adapted into a feature film in 2008, *The Lena Baker Story*; and

28 WHEREAS, to further honor her life, Dr. Janice Liddell created a play, *Who Will Sing for*
29 *Lena*, which won multiple awards at the 2019 national competition of the American
30 Association of Community Theatre: Overall Outstanding Production, Outstanding
31 Achievement in a Leading Role, Outstanding Theatrical Moment, and People's Choice for
32 Favorite Actress; and

33 WHEREAS, the wrongful conviction and execution of Lena Baker and the subsequent
34 emotional damage suffered by her family, friends, and community occurred through no fault
35 of her own; and so it is abundantly fitting and proper to recognize the tragic loss of this
36 remarkable and distinguished Georgian.

37 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
38 the members of this body join in honoring the life and memory of Lena Baker and express
39 their deepest and most sincere regret at her passing.

40 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
41 and directed to make an appropriate copy of this resolution available for distribution to the
42 public and the press.