

MOTION

Biddy Mason (1818–1891) was a nurse, midwife, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and one of the earliest Black landowners in Los Angeles. Born into slavery in Georgia, Mason secured her freedom through the California courts in 1856 and went on to become one of the city’s most influential civic and business leaders. Through her entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and public service, she helped shape the early development of Downtown Los Angeles and the civic, economic, and social foundations of the city.


Following her emancipation, Mason spent the next decade working as a nurse and midwife, carefully saving her earnings until she purchased two lots of land on Spring Street between 4th and 5th Streets in 1866. Although she had secured her freedom, the enduring legacy of slavery continued to deny Black Americans equal rights and limit access to property ownership, wealth, and economic opportunity. Against that backdrop, Mason went on to acquire additional property between what is now Broadway and Spring Street, where she built her home and established businesses that served a rapidly growing city. Her investments shaped what would become the commercial heart of Downtown Los Angeles.

Mason’s legacy extends far beyond real estate. She provided food and shelter to neighbors in need, cared for families as a nurse and midwife, visited jail inmates to offer aid and reconnect them with loved ones, and helped found the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. Her philanthropy, civic leadership, and commitment to community strengthened the city alongside the economic growth she helped foster.

Today, Pershing Square sits just blocks from the land where Biddy Mason lived, worked, invested, and built her legacy. Renaming this civic landmark in her honor would recognize her extraordinary contributions to the founding and development of Downtown Los Angeles while helping ensure that the stories reflected in our public spaces more fully recognize the contributions of Black Angelenos and better reflect the full history of Los Angeles.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council instruct the Department of Recreation and Parks and the Board of Recreation and Parks Commissioners to rename Pershing Square to “Biddy Mason Park” in recognition of Mason’s extraordinary contributions to the founding and development of the City of Los Angeles, and in honor of a woman whose generosity and vision helped shape the city into what it is today.

PRESENTED BY


YSABEL JURADO
Councilmember, 14th District

SECONDED BY



ORIGINAL