

Resolution 250085

Honorary street name George Heriot DeReef
(North Hubbard St from E. Vine St. to E. Brown St., 6th aldermanic district)

Good morning,

My name is Celia Jackson. I am a retired attorney in Milwaukee County. I am here to ask for approval of an honorary street to be named after Attorney George Heriot DeReef.

Many of you may not have heard of Attorney George DeReef. That's because so much of our history is not taught and becomes lost. He was actively engaged in the promotion of economic and social conditions of African Americans in Milwaukee in the early 20th century.

In 2018 I was involved with a project with some of my fellow African American Attorneys to create a directory to highlight some of our history. We did research on many of the attorneys of African descent in Wisconsin starting with William T. Green who was the first, an 1892 graduate of UW-Madison Law School. You may be aware of some of the more contemporary African American attorneys such as James Dorsey, (who DeReef was in private practice with) Lloyd Barbee, Mabel Raimey, Clarence Parish and of course, Dale and Vel Phillips.

It was in working on this project that I learned of Attorney DeReef and other African American attorneys who faced many professional and societal challenges during their time. We stand on their shoulders. It is important for us to recognize the work they did in this community and incumbent on us to share their names and teach about their contributions. How much of our history is lost because the work of those who came before us are not documented? I assert way too much. That is why the work of places like the Wisconsin Black Historical Museum and the Black Holocaust Museum, and Wisconsin Historical Society is crucial.

Attorney DeReef moved to Milwaukee in 1913 after graduating from Howard University Law School in 1905. He clerked with a municipal judge in Washington D.C. before relocating to Wisconsin.

While here, he opened a private practice. He was one of three African American attorneys during that time. (1915) He was instrumental in working with the Milwaukee Central Council of Social Agencies and Pastor Jesse Woods of St. Mark AME Church in establishing a chapter of the Urban League in Milwaukee in 1919. Soon thereafter a local chapter of the NAACP was established in Milwaukee. Both of these agencies addressed the many inequities facing African Americans during that time.

It should be noted that there are many who fought valiantly to improve the economic and social conditions of African Americans who often don't receive much of a footnote of their efforts and they are essentially unknown. The naming of a street in honor of Attorney DeReef is a way for us to recognize the difference he made in this community. He was a progressive force having served as President of the local chapter of the NAACP, Co- editor of the Advocacy newspaper, Director of the Milwaukee Urban League and President of Columbia Building and Loan. As a newspaper editor, he brought attention to the fact that Wisconsin Congressman W. H. Stafford, voted against passage of the anti-lynching bill.

He was an ardent civil rights activist and businessman who utilized his legal abilities to improve the conditions of African Americans in Milwaukee and to persuade Illinois Governor Phillips to have an exhibit at the Chicago Expo to bring business to Milwaukee because there was an excellent pool of laborers here. His advocacy and business acumen helped to build an industrial workforce in Black Milwaukee.

I ask that you consider assigning an honorary street after George Heriott DeReef. An important legal mind and leader in Milwaukee from his arrival in 1913 to his passing in 1937.

