

The Sweet Taste Of Freedom

By Lesley Leslie



When you think about the month of February, some of the more common observances that come to mind are Valentine's Day, month-long Black History celebrations, Groundhog Day, President Lincoln and Washington's birthdays or even Ash Wednesday. However, there are a number of other observances during the month of February, such as Fat Tuesday, Boy Scout Day, Be Humble Day or Susan B. Anthony Day. Although these lesser known observances do not result in a day off from work or school, they are just as noteworthy. One such observance is called National Freedom Day.

National Freedom Day commemorates Feb. 1, 1865 — when Abraham Lincoln, who was the nation's 16th president, signed a joint resolution that proposed the 13th amendment to the United States Constitution. This amendment officially abolished the act of slavery.

Major Richard Robert Wright Sr., a former slave born on May 16, 1855, founded the National Freedom Day Association and he played a crucial role in creating the observance as a way for all Americans to celebrate freedom. Wright was a community leader in Philadelphia and was active in education, the media, business and politics.

On June 30, 1948, President Harry Truman signed a bill to proclaim Feb. 1 as the first official National Freedom Day in the United States. Although the observance has traditionally been marked by laying a wreath at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, the observance has not received the amount of national attention that is befitting of it. With all of the dissention and division that is prevalent in our country today, a celebration such as this is very timely. It's just the sort of reminder that we all need to bring us back to a place where we can honestly appreciate and recognize goodwill and the individual freedoms that we take for granted.