

PLEASED TO CELEBRATE MIFFLIN WISTAR GIBBS – FIRST BLACK PERSON ELECTED TO PUBLIC OFFICE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Mifflin Wistar Gibbs was the first Black person elected to public office in what is now British Columbia — he was also an abolitionist, entrepreneur, carpenter, diplomat, father, lawyer, and banker.

His storied life began in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1823. He grew up in a free Black family, and at a young age joined Frederick Douglass and the campaign to abolish slavery. After apprenticing as a carpenter, the Gold Rush drew him to California in 1850. Over the next eight years, he became a prosperous merchant, started the state's first Black newspaper, built up a business and political network, and helped lead the nascent civil rights movement.

However, his success and high profile eventually led him to move north to British Columbia, leading 800 fellow Black immigrants fleeing the persecution of pre-Civil War America and looking for better protections under British rule.

Mifflin built a life on Vancouver Island with his wife Maria Ann Alexander and their five children, again running a slew of successful businesses — from real estate to resource development — and becoming an outspoken leader on civil rights.

When he was elected to Victoria City Council in 1866, he became the first Black person elected to public office in what's now B.C. (He was also just the second Black person elected in what is now Canada, and the third in all of North America.) His efforts in colonial B.C. helped secure suffrage for Black settlers and gave his community a voice in local government — he even influenced the colony's eventual decision to join Confederation.

Following the American Civil War, Mifflin returned to the United States. He became a lawyer and traversed the South under Reconstruction, where he again championed civil rights before settling in Arkansas to practice law. He was appointed U.S. consul to Madagascar, and he helped open a largely Black bank in segregated Arkansas.

After a long and illustrious career, he retired wealthy and influential though not widely known for his many



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accomplishments. Mifflin died in 1915 at the age of 92.

McMillan LLP is pleased to celebrate Mifflin Wistar Gibbs as an Agent of Change. Mifflin's legacy as a warrior for civil rights, a groundbreaking politician, and an influential leader is felt to this day on both sides of the border.