

BILL NO. 36-0333

Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

July 21, 2026

An act renaming Queen Street in the town of Christiansted, Queen Street in the town of Frederiksted, and Custom House Street in Frederiksted in honor of the Queens of the Fireburn of 1878

PROPOSED BY: Senator Clifford A. Joseph, Sr.
Sponsor: Angel L. Bolques, Jr.

WHEREAS, on July 3, 1848, enslaved Africans led by Moses “General Buddhoe” Gottlieb on St. Croix rebelled against the brutal system of chattel slavery and the deceptive “gradual emancipation” plan enforced by the Danish Crown in the Danish West Indies; and

WHEREAS, over 9,000 enslaved people marched on Fort Frederik in Frederiksted, demanding immediate freedom or threatening to burn the town; and

WHEREAS, Danish Governor-General Peter von Scholten, shocked and overwhelmed, granted the demand, declaring all enslaved people in the Danish West Indies free; and

WHEREAS, in 1849, interim Danish Governor General Peder Hansen drafted and decreed the Labor Act of 1849 to appease plantation owners; and

WHEREAS, King Frederik VII of Denmark and Danish Prime Minister Anders S. Orsted ratified the Labor Law of 1849, which bound the formerly enslaved to one-year

1 contracts on plantations, and only permitted the formerly enslaved to change employers or
2 renegotiate terms once a year on October 1; and

3 **WHEREAS**, on October 1, 1878, estate laborers on St. Croix organized a protest against
4 the plantation owners, protesting their systematic economic exploitation and the plantation
5 owners' refusal to repeal the labor law; and

6 **WHEREAS**, from October 1, 1878 to October 5, 1878, the protest escalated when
7 houses, sugar mills, sugar fields, and stores on approximately 50 plantations on St. Croix were
8 burned down; over half the town of Frederiksted was burned down, as well as mid-island and
9 some parts of what is now known as Christiansted, with the intention of burning all the way
10 east to Bassin Jailhouse; and

11 **WHEREAS**, Mary Thomas, Axeline "Agnes" Elizabeth Salomon, Mathilda McBean,
12 and Susanna Abramsen served as strategic organizers and leaders of the 1878 rebellion, leading
13 agricultural workers across St. Croix; and

14 **WHEREAS**, the women used traditional chants, songs, and visual symbols to unite the
15 workers, instill courage, and break the psychological fear of the Danish military; leading and
16 participating in the systematic burning of sugar cane fields, mills, and estate houses; and

17 **WHEREAS**, immediately after the Labor Uprising of 1878, widely known as
18 "Fireburn", martial law was declared during which over 400 laborers were arrested and tried,
19 including Mary Thomas, Axeline "Agnes" Elizabeth Salomon, Mathilda McBean, and Susanna
20 Abramsen; and

21 **WHEREAS**, on June 19, 1882, Mary Thomas, Agnes Salomon, Susanna Abramsen and
22 Mathilde McBean were transferred to Christianshavn women's prison in Copenhagen,
23 Denmark to complete their sentences; and

1 **WHEREAS**, in 1886, Susanna Abramsen was repatriated to St. Croix to serve the
2 remainder of her life sentence in local custody; and

3 **WHEREAS**, in 1887, Mary Thomas, Agnes Salomon, and Mathilda McBean were
4 repatriated to St. Croix to finish their life sentences under local custody; and

5 **WHEREAS**, Mary Thomas, Axeline “Agnes” Salomon, Mathilde McBean, and Susanna
6 Abramson are recognized as the “Queens of the Fireburn” for their role in the 1878 Labor
7 Uprising; and

8 **WHEREAS**, Act No. 7158 established Fireburn Day, commemorated in public schools
9 on October 1; and

10 **WHEREAS**, Act No. 8543 mandates the erection of a monument honoring and
11 commending the Fireburn Queens and the other estate laborers involved in the Labor Uprising
12 of 1878; and

13 **WHEREAS**, the thoroughfare connecting Frederiksted and Christiansted is named the
14 Queen Mary Highway in honor of Mary Thomas; Now, Therefore,

15 ***Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:***

16 **SECTION 1.** (a) Queen Street in the town of Christiansted is renamed the “Axeline
17 “Queen Agnes” Elizabeth Salomon Street”;

18 (b) Queen Street in the town of Frederiksted is renamed the “Mathilda “Queen
19 Mathilda” McBean Street”; and

20 (c) Custom House Street in the town of Frederiksted is renamed the “Susanna “Queen
21 Susanna” Abramsen Street”.

22 **SECTION 2.** The Department of Public Works shall erect street signage bearing the
23 names of the streets in section 1 and a plaque with the respective queen’s biography, at both
24 ends of the streets.

1 **SECTION 3.** (a) Notwithstanding the use restrictions in 33 V.I.C §3087(a), there is
2 appropriated in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2027, the sum of \$30,000 from the St.
3 Croix Capital Improvement Fund to the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works to erect
4 the appropriate street signage and plaques.

5 (b) The funds appropriated in subsection (a) remain available until expended.

6 **BILL SUMMARY**

7 This bill honors the Queens of the Fireburn of 1878 by renaming Queen Street in the
8 town of Christiansted, the “Axeline “Queen Agnes” Elizabeth Salomon Street”; Queen Street
9 in the town of Frederiksted, the “Mathilda “Queen Mathilda” McBean Street”; and Custom
10 House Street in the town of Frederiksted, the “Susanna “Queen Susanna” Abramsen Street”.
11 This bill also appropriates \$30,000 from the St. Croix Capital Improvement Fund to the Virgin
12 Islands Department of Public Works to erect the appropriate street signage and plaques.

13 **BR26-1211/July 13, 2026/GC**