

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 568

By Bowling

A RESOLUTION relative to a historical marker for the Christmas Night Shootout of 1927.

WHEREAS, in January 1927, H. Wetter Manufacturing Company, South Pittsburg's largest employer and an unionized company, closed its stove factory; when Wetter tried to reopen with non-union labor, the unions established picket lines and initiated a strike, which hurt the local economy; and

WHEREAS, heightened tensions between four local unions and Wetter not only drove a wedge between employer and employees, but divided residents, politicians, and law enforcement officers; growing resentment coupled with political rivalries from the last sheriff's race soon led to violence, with lawman battling lawman; and

WHEREAS, the gunfight on Christmas Night 1927 at Third Street and Cedar Avenue in South Pittsburg left six lawmen dead, several injured, and brought national attention to the city; and

WHEREAS, dead were Marion County Sheriff G. Washington "Uncle Wash" Coppinger, Deputy Lorenza A Hennessey, City Night Marshal (former sheriff) Benjamin Parker, City Marshal Ewing Smith, and Wetter guard, Oran H. LaRowe. Police Chief (former union molder) James Conner died the next day; and

WHEREAS, with so many lawmen dead or wounded and tensions still high, Governor Henry H. Horton (1866-1934) ordered in the National Guard to curtail additional violence; and

WHEREAS, six extended families were forever changed by the incident: the men who died had 24 brothers and sisters, many of whom lived in Tennessee; five women were widowed; and 28 children and stepchildren lost a father; and

WHEREAS, this tragic incident had a lasting impact not only on H. Wetter Manufacturing Company, but also on South Pittsburg and Marion County; it was only after an article entitled “Labor Strife in the Southern Stove Industry: Shootout at South Pittsburg” was published in the *Tennessee Historic Quarterly* in 2004 that the greater South Pittsburg community began to discuss the event; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee Historical Commission has approved a Christmas Night Shootout historical marker, and its accompanying text, for placement in South Pittsburg; and

WHEREAS, upon reviewing the approved text for the marker, which included changes made to the original text by the Commission, many members of the South Pittsburg community, including the South Pittsburg Historical Preservation Society, were disappointed; and

WHEREAS, the original text for the marker has been rewritten and important facts removed, especially information about the six men who lost their lives in the incident; the deaths of the incumbent Marion County sheriff, a Marion County deputy, a former Marion County sheriff, the South Pittsburg police chief, a South Pittsburg city marshal, and a H. Wetter Manufacturing Company guard add credibility to the importance of the event; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative that Tennessee’s history be recorded and presented to the public in an accurate and objective manner; and

WHEREAS, the names of the six men who lost their lives in the Christmas Night Shootout of 1927 should be recorded for posterity lest present and future generations forget that historical events have very real human consequences; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that this General Assembly urges the Tennessee Historical Commission to reconsider its actions and restore the original text of the Christmas Night Shootout historical marker to include the names and positions of the six men who lost their lives in the incident before such marker is permanently erected in South Pittsburg.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Tennessee Historical Commission.