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Centennial of “Spirit of 1776” Wagon Highlights New York as Cradle of the Women’s Rights Movement in the United States

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July 1, 2013 to be designated as the “Spirit of 1776” Wagon Day by legislative resolution

Both houses of the NYS Legislature passed a special resolution on June 18, 2013 to honor the centennial of the suffrage campaign wagon’s first trip for organizing purposes 100 years ago on July 1, 1913. The resolution designates July 1, 2013 as the “Spirit of 1776” Wagon Day in New York. The resolution makes the connection between economic development, tourism and the upcoming Votes for Women suffrage centennial for NYS in 2017 and the national suffrage centennial in 2020.

The legislative resolution cites the “Spirit of 1776” suffrage campaign wagon’s connection to current policies of economic and cultural tourism development, the urgent need for NYS to complete the upstate Women’s Heritage Trail, and the support and preservation of key historic homes related to the 72-year campaign to win the vote for women. The suffrage movement took from 1848 and the Seneca Falls Convention to the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution.

Stated Senator Betty Little, chair of the Senate Cultural affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation Committee: “The ‘Spirit of 1776’ suffrage campaign wagon is a powerful historic symbol reminding us all of the ‘new frontier’ that was traveled and conquered by brave and determined women to whom we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude. Many of the suffragists didn’t live to see the destination – the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution – but each and everyone contributed to ensuring a brighter future not only for women, but for our nation and the world. I’m honored to join my colleagues today in this legislative effort to memorialize the wagon as work progresses on plans for that mission.”

Margaret M. Markey, chair of the Assembly Tourism, Parks, Arts and Sports Development Committee noted: “New York led America in extending the vote to women. It’s an honor for us to mark the centennial of the ‘Spirit of 1776’ wagon and to salute some of the crusading pioneers who helped galvanize the nation to adopt the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution. In the coming years we look forward to establishing a Women’s Heritage Trail to connect the historic sites around the state that show the vital role that New York women had in this historic movement.”

Susan Zimet, founder of Votes for Women 2020 and New Paltz, NY Town Supervisor, will be in attendance at the press conference, as well as Deborah L. Hughes,

President and CEO of the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester, a member of the Votes for Women 2020 advisory board.

"As New Yorkers we have a special place in history," continued Susan Zimet, founder of Votes for Women 2020, the nonprofit organization planning suffrage centennial events in 1917 and 2020. "New York's women led the way from Seneca Falls to the Supreme Court. The importance of the work of these brave warriors who paved the way for myself and my daughter are unsung heroes who deserve to have their proper place in history. The passage of this resolution by our New York State elected leaders is a critical step in the recognition of the work ahead of us."

Deborah L. Hughes, President and CEO of the National Susan B. Anthony Museum and House in Rochester, NY and a member of Votes for Women 2020 advisory board, said: "One speech, one march, one wagon at a time...the women of New York have changed the world for all women."

One hundred years ago on July 1, 1913, Votes for Women activists Edna Kearns, Irene Davison, and eight-year-old Serena Kearns left Manhattan from the headquarters of the NYS Woman Suffrage Association and headed to Long Island in the horse-drawn wagon called the "Spirit of 1776" They spent the next month organizing in many communities to gather support for women voting. The wagon and its journey was covered by many New York City and Long Island newspapers.

Four years later in 1917, New York's women finally won the franchise. This was followed by the vote being extended to millions of American women nationwide in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution.

"Having the 'Spirit of 1776' honored like this is the dream of our family," said Marguerite Kearns, granddaughter of Edna Kearns and a member of the advisory board of Votes for Women 2020. Kearns writes and edits a website and blog inspired by her grandmother's "Spirit of 1776" suffrage wagon: <http://suffragewagon.org>

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