



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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National Foundation for Women Legislators National Women's History Museum Initiative

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON November 18, 2011

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In 1827, Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor and noted author launched a campaign to establish a national day of thanks. For 36 years, she published numerous editorials and sent letters to governors, senators, presidents and key officials. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln finally heeded her request with a proclamation declaring Thanksgiving a national holiday.

This is only one of thousands of facts that we generally don't know about the important role that women have played in building the America we know today, simply because we are not taking an active enough role in the education our children are receiving. Only 1 in 10 figures in today's history textbooks is a woman, few statues are in our national parks and less than a dozen of the 214 statues in our nation's Capitol Building portray woman leaders. Yet, women have impacted every aspect of our lives whether it is education, art, medicine, journalism, politics, or technology.

Amazingly enough while many important museums currently exist in Washington, DC that enrich all who visit and tell the story of our nation's history from many different perspectives, there is NO building dedicated to highlighting the achievements and contributions of women.

The experiences and life stories of women like Ms. Hale and so many other important trail-blazers will be part of a permanent exhibition within the soon-to-be-built, world-class National Women's History Museum. Legislation is pending in Congress that will provide a permanent site for the building at the National Mall alongside our nation's most iconic museums (and not one dime of federal money is being requested).

This is an exciting time for women leaders. We hold a multitude of offices at all levels of government. Young women are attending college and earning advanced degrees at the highest rate in history and the future only looks brighter for the girls and young women of tomorrow. While celebrating our current achievements and future hopes, it is important to acknowledge the accomplishments of our past.

The women who helped to build this country – who tended to the families while men were away at war, who built businesses to sustain themselves and their families, and who were innovators in their field - have been left out of our national story.

I have been working with the National Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL), who, in conjunction with more than 43 national women's organizations, has been working in support of the National Women's History Museum (NWHM). Together we will settle the debt we have seen in our history books and museums, by bringing women's history into the mainstream.

We recently held the "*de Pizan Honors*," an event named for Christine de Pizan who lived in Italy in the early 1400s and was the first Western woman to write about women's impact on society and show how they were being left out of history. The "*de Pizan Honors*" gala recognized female history-makers to ensure that their legacy remains alive and drew the attention of acclaimed actress Meryl Streep, who hosted the event and used her notoriety to bring awareness to a cause that is long overdue.

As we gather with our families for the Thanksgiving holiday to recognize the important role we play in each other's lives and to be reminded about the importance of giving thanks to all who have impacted us in some way, let us also remember the importance of giving thanks to the foremothers, like Sarah Josepha Hale, who have impacted us by laying the solid foundation we all benefit from today.