

2015-J3166

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 135th Anniversary of the Borden Home Farm in Wallkill, New York

WHEREAS, Agriculture is an important part of the foundation upon which our distinct American and New York State heritage is built and remains the number one industry in New York State; and

WHEREAS, It is the intent of this Legislative Body to recognize that the quality of life in the communities across this great State of New York is enriched by the many New York farm families whose hard work and ingenuity maintain and improve our food and fiber supply for countless citizens; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 135th Anniversary of the Borden Home Farm in Wallkill, New York; and

WHEREAS, John G. Borden had just become President of America's most pioneering milk company in 1874, when he set out to find his utopia; he sought to establish an impressive farm of at least 1,500 acres along a fertile river valley; the land would be groomed like a park, yet work like a productive farm; and

WHEREAS, The agrarian enterprise would be profitable, but also self-sustaining, and its dozens of workers would eat, drink and make their living from its bounty; John G. Borden spent years combing rural areas along the railroads that snaked through Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, His search for paradise ended in 1881, when John G. Borden visited a large homestead atop a hill in southern Ulster County, New York; from there, he could see the rolling fields which hugged the Wallkill River, the Shawangunk Mountains and Hudson Highlands which rose in

the distance, and the Wallkill Valley Railroad which shipped people and goods to New York City; this innovative farmer called it the most beautiful place in the world; and

WHEREAS, John G. Borden purchased the homestead and its 261 acres for \$35,000; he then began to purchase farms around his new home, and quickly amassed more than 1,700 acres that would be known as the Borden Home Farm; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the next 50 years, a bustling village also grew in that valley, a hamlet that John G. Borden would name Wallkill; the village benefitted immensely from the wealth, benevolence and ingenuity of the Borden family, which donated land for a library and school, helped build dozens of homes for its workers and even brought electricity to their dreamland; and

WHEREAS, John G. Borden's father, Gail Borden, revolutionized the dairy industry by inventing and patenting condensed milk in 1856; the federal government paid him millions to provide condensed milk to the Union Army during the Civil War, and it later became popular across America; and

WHEREAS, After the death of his father, John G. Borden took over the family business; during his 11 years as President of the company, he put liquid milk in glass bottles for the first time and opened several more condensories across the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Borden dairy empire grew, but historical sources say John G. Borden increasingly focused on the Borden Home Farm and his vision for the ideal community which would surround it; the huge farm comprised most of the hamlet of Wallkill, stretching south to Lake Osiris and east to the top of Kings Hill, near the Town of Newburgh border; and

WHEREAS, Records from 1889 show the robust farm included 246 beef cattle, 250 hogs, 600 sheep, 400 poultry, 77 milking cows, 50 young heifers and bulls, 650 apple trees, 110 acres of corn, and it produced grapes for juice, 200 bushels of rye and 1,000 bushels of oats; and

WHEREAS, The prosperous farm was dotted with numerous barns, cottages for workers, 40 miles of roads and a network of walking paths also were built; the farm featured 11 lakes which were channeled together into a concrete reservoir; and

WHEREAS, To operate and maintain his farm, John G. Borden required a huge workforce; some records show that housing was required for at least 88 workers; and

WHEREAS, The Bordens, benevolent and community minded, believed their workers deserved a central village near the farm in which to raise their families; in 1883, he hired draftsmen to plot his dream village on a 4-foot by 8-foot map that was labeled Wallkill; and

WHEREAS, John G. Borden donated a park, filled and graded the new village, built many of the roads, installed sewer and drainage lines and then provided the materials and plans for his employees to build their own homes in Wallkill; and

WHEREAS, In 1884, Borden's New York Condensed Milk Company built its largest condensory, built of local brick and employed dozens, along Route 208; it was designed to process the milk of 5,000 cows from nearby farms in Ulster and Orange counties; and

WHEREAS, John G. Borden's commitment to Wallkill also had a personal touch; he is said to have given a bag of 25 new pennies and an American flag on Memorial Day to every child at the old school on Bridge Street, and distributed ice cream and cake across the village to mark the holiday; in addition, the Bordens hosted many other social events at the Home Farm to celebrate local farmers; and

WHEREAS, John G. Borden died in October of 1891, at the young age of 47; his wife, Ellen, would manage the Home Farm until 1904, when his youngest daughter, Marion, took over and invested even more in the farm, its workers and the community; and

WHEREAS, Marion Borden contributed to Wallkill in new ways; in 1908, she brought electricity to Wallkill for the first time by building a steam-powered electric station at the Home Farm; the station lit the

farm and the mansion at first, but quickly expanded to provide power to the family's workers and neighbors in Wallkill; and
WHEREAS, Marion Borden also introduced telephone service to Wallkill; the system provided communication among the 70 Home Farm buildings and was soon connected to the Walden Telephone Company to allow for outside
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calls; and

WHEREAS, Under Marion Borden's leadership, farm equipment with diesel engines replaced horse-drawn implements, and a 100-foot-tall water tower was also erected to provide pressurized water across the Home Farm, which had its own fire company; and

WHEREAS, Marion Borden, her sister Nellie, and her mother were founding members of the Wallkill Library Association; they would give loans, money, and books from the Borden farm to the village library; and

WHEREAS, Marion Borden was a member of the local school board and hosted board meetings at her mansion; in 1919, she donated land for the construction of a modern high school to be named after her father; and

WHEREAS, The Ulster County Girl Scouts were among Marion Borden's favorite benefactors; after her death in 1930, she left 26 acres of the farm to the Girl Scouts for a camp, and donated land for a boys camp which today is known as Camp Robbins; and

WHEREAS, Marion Borden's generosity continued even after her early death; in her will, she left \$25,000 for the construction of a library

and \$5,000 to be held in trust for the library's benefit; she also left money for the construction of an all-purpose gym and theater at the Wallkill Reformed Church, and the new high school was given money for an auditorium and swimming pool; and

WHEREAS, The Borden Home Farm was bequeathed to the Masons, who quickly sold off pieces of the farm, mostly to other local farmers; Marion Borden's grand mansion became a school for a while, and today, it is owned by the School of Practical Philosophy, which hosts lectures and

retreats there; and

WHEREAS, Currently, the house, owned by Alexander Hoyt, is now something of a landmark for people who care about the history of the valley and appreciate the philanthropic traditions of the Borden family; and

WHEREAS, The proud heritage of the Borden Home Farm continues to change and expand with the times, and will forever be a symbol of the family who shaped it with their wealth, which was only outweighed by their abiding generosity to the place they named Wallkill; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 135th Anniversary of the Borden Home Farm; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Alexander Hoyt, Owner, the Borden Home Farm, Wallkill, New York.