



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael F. Nozzolio

## Senator Nozzolio: We are Honored to Celebrate the 150th Sesquicentennial Anniversary of Memorial Day

MICHAEL F. NOZZOLIO May 23, 2016

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This weekend we celebrate in Waterloo, New York and all across the Nation the Sesquicentennial 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the sacred commemoration of Memorial Day.

It was on May 5, 1866, the Village of Waterloo led by local pharmacist Henry Welles, was decorated with flags at half-staff, draped evergreens with mourning black while veterans

and residents alike marched to music in celebration of the nation's first Memorial Day.

The official journal of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, the Banner, for May 1933 contained this item:

*“The morning of May 5, 1866, dawned clear and beautiful in the little town of Waterloo, New York. It was a morning that was to see the beginning of a beautiful, sacred and solemn custom, a practice that was eventually to become accepted and universally practiced by the American people.... Visualize to yourself what a scene this must have been. Flags floating proudly on the balmy spring breeze, flowers piled in great profusion; flowers that had been gathered by the school children...members of that large body of soldiers who compressed the Union Army during the War that only a year previous, they had brought to a successful conclusion....marched to the strains of martial music to the local cemetery and proceeded to decorate the graves of their departed comrades.”*

First the New York State Legislature, and then the United States Congress recognized the importance of our Nation's very first commemoration of Memorial Day in Waterloo, New York.

In 1966, our region's then Congressman, Sam Stratton, sponsored and the House of Representatives enacted a formal House Resolution declaring Waterloo, New York the birthplace of Memorial Day. President Lyndon Johnson soon after signed the official proclamation establishing this Federal designation.

Growing up in the Finger Lakes I greatly admired the thorough, personable and dedicated manner in which Congressman Stratton represented our region. His service was the model from which I sought to follow for these last three and a half decades. Recently, I read the original debate of the Memorial Day Resolution as reported verbatim in the May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1966 Congressional Record, and was very impressed with the extensive research Congressman Stratton then presented to the full Congress advocating for this important designation of Waterloo, New York as the nationally recognized “Birthplace of Memorial Day”.

At many Memorial Day ceremonies throughout our region and the Nation, the orders from General John A. Logan, first Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, establishing Memorial Day on an official continuing basis are read. Congressman Stratton noted that Waterloo’s original Memorial Day observance occurred a full 2 years before General Logan issued his orders. Citing historical information from the Library of Congress during the floor debate, Congressman Stratton stated the records clearly indicate that the ceremony which took place in Waterloo on May 5, 1866 was the first time any community had set aside a day, to be observed henceforth on an annual basis, not only for decorating graves and paying tribute to the honored dead, but also as a general, public holiday, specifically set aside and designated for that purpose.

As their New York State Senator, I proudly commend the wonderful community of Waterloo for taking its responsibilities as the nationally designated birthplace of Memorial Day with steadfast reverence and tremendous honor for these past 150 years.

This Memorial Day, I have the significant honor to serve as an Honorary Co-Chair of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Village of Waterloo's Memorial Day celebration. I thank the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Memorial Day 2016 Committee Co-Chairs, Jane Shaffer and Deputy Mayor David Duprey, and all the Committee's volunteers for their great work to make this Memorial Day weekend in Waterloo even more special.

Among the many local, State and National dignitaries who will be in attendance, it gives me special pleasure that the head of the New York State Canal Corporation, Director Brian Stratton, will be with us to celebrate this historic occasion. Canal Director Stratton is the son of former Congressman Sam Stratton. I have had the pleasure of working with Brian for a number of years, and over that time, we have enjoyed many fond remembrances of his dad's congressional representation of our region, including the important designation of Waterloo, New York as the official birthplace of Memorial Day.

Each year on Memorial Day, Waterloo, New York leads the Nation in celebrating our rich history of sacrifice to ensure our freedom, and freedom throughout the world. As Americans, we have no greater obligation than to honor and acknowledge our veterans for the countless sacrifices they have made to protect our safety and the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. The citizens of Waterloo exemplify the true meaning of patriotism and the meaning of Memorial Day.

Memorial Day continues to serve as a powerful reminder that freedom is not free, but paid for with courage, valor and sacrifice. No nation in the history of the world has ever done

more or given more in the defense of world freedom than the United States and its citizens.

It is my hope you will come to Waterloo to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Memorial Day. Activities are scheduled throughout the weekend, but the centerpiece of this historic event will take place during the afternoon of Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup> with a reception at the Memorial Day Museum at 2pm, Parade at 4pm on Main Street, and formal ceremony at 5pm in Lafayette Park. You can find a complete list of Memorial Day weekend events in Waterloo on their website at <http://waterloony.com/> and then click on the “Celebrate Commemorate” link or by [clicking here](#).