

2015-J6009

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Fenian Invasion of 1866 on June 4, 2016

WHEREAS, It is the intent of this Legislative Body to commemorate those events of historical significance which add strength, vigor and inspiration to the cultural diversity and quality of life in the communities of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Fenian Invasion of 1866, to be celebrated with a myriad of events; and

WHEREAS, On Friday, June 3, 2016, residents are invited to a "Muster the Troops!" Hooley at the Buffalo Irish Center; on Saturday, June 4, 2016, a commemorative parade will march from the Buffalo Religious Arts Center to Tow Path Park, and then the Ancient Order of Hibernians will host a ceremony at the Fenian Invasion of 1866 Monument; and

WHEREAS, In addition, a reception will be held at the Black Rock Historical Society Museum following the commemoration ceremony; and

WHEREAS, On June 2, 1866, an encounter at Ridgeway between Canadian militia and the Fenian Brotherhood's force of Civil War veterans left enduring marks upon the history of Canada, the United States, and Ireland; regiments of a self-styled "army of liberation" crossed an international border and fought British subjects on behalf of the Irish Republic; and

WHEREAS, The Fenian raids of the Fenian Brotherhood, an Irish Republican organization who were based in the United States, on British army forts, customs posts and other targets in Canada, were fought to bring pressure on Britain to withdraw from Ireland; and

WHEREAS, On Thursday, May 31, 1866, it became apparent that Fenian

forces were massing in the area of Malone, New York, and St. Albans, Vermont, for a push across the Canadian border; there was also overwhelming information pointing to a crossing of the Niagara River from Buffalo, and subsequently, British Army units in Canada and the Volunteer Militia of Upper Canada were alerted, and the Militia at Toronto and on the Niagara peninsula were ordered to Port Colborne; and WHEREAS, As the sun went down, John O'Neill was ordered to lead the Buffalo expedition across the Niagara River into Canada; although he received no maps or additional information, he was to have Buffalo's 7th IRA Regiment as part of his force; barges had been positioned at the Pratt Blast Furnace dock in Black Rock, New York, just north of Buffalo, and steam tugs were to take them across the river; and WHEREAS, John O'Neill wore a gray set of clothing with a green-decorated military cap, and many of Owen Starr's Louisville men wore blue army jackets with green facings and a good number of the Ohio regiment donned green shirts and green caps; and WHEREAS, Officers were armed with swords and pistols, and the men carried five banners which were the six-foot-square regimental size; two of the banners were United States National, and three were green, two of which sported the golden sunburst and one reportedly bore a harp; and WHEREAS, John O'Neill had given command of his Tennessee regiment to Captain Shields, and Owen Starr would command his Kentuckians and the Indiana detachment; Owen Starr was to make quickly for the ruins of the old military emplacement called Fort Erie, south of the same-named village; and WHEREAS, Owen Starr was ordered to seize any railroad rolling stock he might find, cut telegraph wires, and destroy track leading to Port Colborne so there would be no troop trains rushing in from that direction; John O'Neill would use the New Yorkers, Ohioans, and Tennesseans to secure Fort Erie village and establish a defensive perimeter; and WHEREAS, Before dawn on Friday, June 1, 1866, John O'Neill and his

force of a thousand men were poised for a quick march from Buffalo to the Black Rock dock; just as the United States District Attorney ordered the USS MICHIGAN's Captain to stop all movement across the Niagara River, the Fenian force was crowding into the barges at Pratt's dock; and

WHEREAS, Sabotaged by Fenians and its crew, the side-wheel gunboat USS MICHIGAN did not begin intercepting Fenian reinforcements until 2:15 p.m., 14 hours after Owen Starr's advance party of Kentuckians and the Indiana detachment had crossed the river ahead of John O'Neill's main force; once the USS MICHIGAN was deployed, John O'Neill's force in the Niagara Region was cut off from further supplies and reinforcements; and WHEREAS, After assembling with other units from the province and travelling all night, the Canadians advanced into a well-laid ambush (Battle of Ridgeway) by approximately 600-700 Fenians the next morning north of Ridgeway; even though the Canadian militia consisted of inexperienced volunteers with no more than basic drill training, they were armed with Enfield rifled muskets equal to the armaments of the Fenians, who were mostly battle-hardened American Civil War veterans, armed with weapons procured from leftover war supplies, either Enfield rifled muskets or the comparable Springfield; and

WHEREAS, The opposing forces exchanged volleys for about two hours, before a series of command errors threw the Canadians into confusion; the Fenians took advantage of it by launching a bayonet charge which broke the inexperienced Canadian ranks; and

WHEREAS, After the battle, the Canadians retreated to Port Colborne, at the Lake Erie end of the Welland Canal, and the Fenians rested briefly at Ridgeway, before returning to Fort Erie; another encounter followed which saw several Canadians severely wounded and the surrender of a large group of local Canadian militia who had moved into the Fenian rear; and

WHEREAS, After considering the inability of reinforcements to cross the river and the approach of large numbers of both militia and British

regulars, the remaining Fenians released the Canadian prisoners and returned to Buffalo early in the morning of June 3; they were intercepted by the USS MICHIGAN and surrendered to the American Navy; and

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to commend the efforts of those institutions which seek to bring recognition to histor-

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ical events within the State of New York, and in doing so, help to ensure that the complete history of our State and Nation is preserved and shared with present generations of citizens; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is pleased to have this opportunity to express its highest admiration for the Black Rock Historical Society, and for all of the individuals who have worked to bring proper attention to a place and time which merits recognition in the grand panorama of the history of our State and Nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Fenian Invasion of 1866 on June 4, 2016; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Black Rock Historical Society.