

2017-J3558

Senate Resolution No. 3558

BY: Senator MARCHIONE

HONORING Edmonia Lewis posthumously for special recognition in observance of Black History Month

WHEREAS, It is incumbent upon the people of the State of New York to recognize and acknowledge those within our midst who have made significant contributions to the quality of life therein; and

WHEREAS, From time to time this Legislative Body takes note of certain extraordinary individuals it wishes to recognize for their valued contributions to the success and progress of society and publicly acknowledge their endeavors which have enhanced the basic humanity among us all; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is justly proud to honor Edmonia Lewis posthumously for special recognition in observance of Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, Edmonia Lewis persevered through racial and gender discrimination to become a world-renowned sculptor; and

WHEREAS, Born Mary Edmonia Lewis on July 4, 1844, in Greenbush, New York, she was the daughter of a Native American mother (full blooded Chippewa) and an African-American father; she was raised on a reservation, known by her Indian name, Wildfire; by the time she was

eight years-old, both her parents had died and young Edmonia was raised by her two aunts on the reservation; and

WHEREAS, Her older brother, Samuel, insisted on Edmonia getting an education, so he paid her tuition and she enrolled at a boarding day school in Albany, New York; and

WHEREAS, After four years, she went on to attend New York College from 1856 until 1858 before enrolling in Oberlin College in Ohio, which she attended from 1859 until 1862; it was at Oberlin, Edmonia found her talent and love of art; and

WHEREAS, After Edmonia was falsely accused of first poisoning two of her friends and again of stealing, Oberlin, fearing bad publicity, did not expel her but simply did not renew her enrollment for the next semester; and

WHEREAS, Humiliated, Chippewa tradition calls for revenge for humiliation; Edmonia Lewis vowed to show Oberlin they had misjudged and mistreated her, and she would do this through her art; and

WHEREAS, Edmonia Lewis headed to Boston and sought out sculptor, Edward A. Brackett, who sculpted the bust of John Brown; he began teaching her the art of sculpting; and

WHEREAS, On May 28, 1863, Edmonia Lewis stood on a curb in Boston and watched the famous all black 54th Massachusetts Regiment march by, led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, who was from a prominent white family;

six weeks later, Colonel Shaw, along with most of the 54th Regiment were killed in battle when they charged Fort Wagner in South Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Emotionally moved by Colonel Shaw, a white man who chose to lead a black regiment and by his death in battle, Edmonia Lewis created a bust of Colonel Shaw, her first major well received work; today, the sculpture can be found in the Museum of African American History in Boston; and

WHEREAS, Edmonia Lewis then traveled to Rome, Italy, to further her training in the Neoclassicism style of the time; she produced major pieces of internationally recognized and critically acclaimed work; and

WHEREAS, Edmonia Lewis' most famous work was the Death of Cleopatra which was carved in 1876 and brought over from Rome to the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia; after being moved around to several places, today, it can be found in the Smithsonian American Art Museum; and

WHEREAS, During the late 1800s, Edmonia Lewis visited the United States numerous times; her work was presented in major galleries and exhibitions and sold for large sums of money; her new-found popularity made her studio a tourist attraction; and

WHEREAS, Edmonia Lewis rose above the meanness and violence she experienced; in the courage of those who fought against slavery, struggled against the oppression of women, and in the spirituality of native Americans, and ultimately her religious faith, she found her great themes; and

WHEREAS, Edmonia Lewis died on September 17, 1907, and is buried in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, in London, England; her death notice was published in the Tablet, and upon her request, it simple states "Edmonia Lewis, Spinster and Sculptor"; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month is a time to reflect on the struggles and victories of African Americans throughout our country's history and to recognize their numerous valuable contributions to the protection of our democratic society in times of war and in peace; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor Edmonia Lewis posthumously for special recognition in observance of Black History Month; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Town of East Greenbush, New York.