

1 State of Arkansas
2 92nd General Assembly
3 Regular Session, 2019

A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1780

4
5 By: Representatives Della Rosa, D. Ferguson, Nicks
6 By: Senator K. Ingram

For An Act To Be Entitled

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8
9 AN ACT TO CREATE THE SULTANA DISASTER REMEMBRANCE
10 DAY; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Subtitle

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13
14 TO RECOGNIZE AND REMEMBER THE GREATEST
15 MARITIME DISASTER IN UNITED STATES
16 HISTORY.

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19 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

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21 SECTION 1. Arkansas Code Title 1, Chapter 5, Subchapter 1, is amended
22 to add an additional section to read as follows:

23 1-5-117. Sultana Disaster Remembrance Day.

24 (a) The General Assembly finds that:

25 (1) The steamboat SS Sultana was launched from Litherbury
26 Shipyard in Cincinnati, Ohio, in February 1863 as one of the largest and best
27 business steamers ever constructed;

28 (2) Its capacity of three hundred seventy-six (376) passengers
29 and crewmembers attracted the United States Army to commandeer it for use as
30 a supply and soldier transport vessel during the Civil War;

31 (3) The United States Army chartered the Sultana at Vicksburg,
32 Mississippi, to transport over two thousand three hundred (2,300) passengers,
33 including over two thousand (2,000) recently released Union prisoners of war
34 from the Andersonville and Cahaba prisons in the South back home to the
35 North;

36 (4) On April 26, 1865, the Sultana stopped at Helena, Arkansas,



1 the location at which photographer Thomas W. Bankes took the only photograph
2 in existence of the grossly overcrowded vessel and its doomed passengers;

3 (5)(A) At 2:00 a.m. on April 27, 1865, the Sultana's boiler
4 system erupted in a massive explosion just seven (7) miles north of Memphis,
5 Tennessee, causing a conflagration of fire and flying shrapnel and the
6 venting of deadly steam that resulted in over two thousand (2,000)
7 casualties, of which more than one thousand two hundred (1,200) died from the
8 explosion itself.

9 (B) Nearly seven hundred (700) more individuals were
10 dragged to safety over several hours and taken to five (5) Memphis hospitals,
11 with many perishing later from injuries, burns, and exposure to the frigid
12 Mississippi River floodwaters;

13 (6) Several Crittenden County, Arkansas, citizens were
14 officially credited with saving dozens of lives that night by wading into the
15 flooded Mississippi River to retrieve victims of the tragedy as they floated
16 downriver;

17 (7) The event was made all the more tragic by evidence of greed,
18 corruption, malfeasance in office, and dereliction of officer duty, as noted
19 by a following United States Army investigation into the disaster;

20 (8) The event occurred in the Mound City, Arkansas, and Marion,
21 Arkansas, areas of the Mississippi River, places where the remains of the
22 Sultana and its lost souls still rest today and where Arkansas citizens were
23 the saviors of many survivors that night;

24 (9) The United States House of Representatives passed a
25 resolution in 2009 acknowledging the explosion of the SS Sultana as the
26 greatest maritime disaster in United States history; and

27 (10) The lives and service of all the soldiers, passengers, and
28 local citizens involved in the tragedy are currently honored and recognized
29 with a temporary exhibit of Sultana artifacts in Marion, Arkansas, with plans
30 for a permanent Sultana Disaster Museum by 2020 in Marion, Arkansas.

31 (b) April 27 each year shall be known as "Sultana Disaster Remembrance
32 Day" to commemorate Arkansas's role in the greatest maritime disaster in
33 United States history.

34 (c) Sultana Disaster Remembrance Day is not a legal holiday but is a
35 memorial day to be commemorated by the issuance of an appropriate
36 proclamation by the Governor.

APPROVED: 4/8/19