

Assembly Resolution No. 1416

BY: M. of A. Jenne

COMMEMORATING the life and service of Benjamin Christian, an American patriot and hero

WHEREAS, Members of the New York State Armed Services, who have served valiantly and honorably in wars in which this country's freedom was at stake, and have proven their bravery and patriotism through acts of heroism, deserve special recognition from this Legislative Body; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, it is the intent of this Legislative Body to commemorate the life and service of Benjamin Christian, an American patriot and hero, injured three times in battle and taken as a prisoner of war on two occasions; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Christian was born as a slave around 1778 in New York State and settled in the Ogdensburg area in the early 1800s; he spent his early years as an indentured servant to an Army officer in an area near the Hudson River and was believed to be approximately 90 years of age when he died on December 18, 1868, while wintering at the poor house in Canton; he was buried in an unmarked grave at the Poor House Cemetery in Canton; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Christian worked in the years before the War of 1812 as a boatman on the St. Lawrence River, performing various duties ranging from cook to deckhand; and

WHEREAS, When hostilities broke out during the War of 1812, Benjamin Christian, first as a civilian and then as an enlisted member of the military, answered the call to duty; and

WHEREAS, On July 31, 1812, he was aboard the Julia, carrying military supplies from Sackets Harbor to Ogdensburg when it came under attack in Morristown by two British ships; and

WHEREAS, The Julia with her crew of all volunteers carried three guns/cannons; during the exchange of gunfire with the 28 guns on the British ships, three cannon shots struck the hull of the Julia; miraculously none of the crew members were killed or wounded; the British ships withdrew to Elizabethtown, now Brockville, after the battle; and

WHEREAS, In the middle of August, Benjamin Christian volunteered to go on a Durham boat, the Blackbird, taking anchors and cable from Ogdensburg to Sackets Harbor; while they were still in the midst of the Islands, a British gunboat captured their boat and crew; Benjamin was taken prisoner, confined in Elizabethtown, then forwarded to the prison at Montreal; and

WHEREAS, In February 1813, there was a prisoner exchange at Rouses Point and Benjamin Christian was among those exchanged and sent to

Plattsburgh; there, he courageously enlisted in the 6th US Army; and

WHEREAS, During the Battle of York on April 27, 1813, Benjamin Christian received severe wounds to his left arm and side; after the battle, he was taken from York to Fort Niagara for several days before returning to Sackets Harbor, where he was kept in the barracks for about two months, disabled; it was during that same year that he enlisted to go on a campaign, cruising the St. Lawrence River looking for supplies; and

WHEREAS, While on this expedition, they discovered several British batteaux and a gunboat that were docked for the night at Rockport, Canada; they captured one British gunboat and 16 batteaux with cargoes consisting of clothes, provisions, and a large supply of military munitions destined to go up-river for the British troops stationed at Kingston; and

WHEREAS, Deciding not to return to Sackets Harbor immediately after capturing the boats and supplies, they took the boats across the river to the safety of Cranberry Creek near present day Alexandria Bay; the British, knowing that the American forces were holed up in Cranberry Creek, followed in boats with about 400 - 450 military troops and Marines, hoping to retake their boats, regain their supplies, and punish the Americans for their deeds; and

WHEREAS, A lively battle ensued at Cranberry Creek between the British and the American troops and sailors; Benjamin Christian was severely wounded in the head during the land fight and had to be carried from the battle site back to the campsite; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Christian fought in the battle of French Creek, November 1 and 2, 1813; on the morning of the second day, while charging the enemy, he was again wounded in the head by a cutlass and in the left arm by a musket ball; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Christian was now disabled from service for the rest of the year; despite his injuries, he displayed strong perseverance and patriotism and during the winter of 1813 - 1814, he rejoined his former company; and

WHEREAS, During the British blockade of Sackets Harbor, from May 19 - June 6, 1814, Benjamin Christian was on a Durham boat carrying flour and attempting to run the blockade to take supplies to the besieged Village of Sackets Harbor; and

WHEREAS, The boat and crew, including Benjamin Christian, were captured and were to be taken under guard to Kingston; the crew managed to re-capture control of the boat and cargo, and when out of sight of the British fleet, returned to an American port; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Christian spent the years after the end of hostilities living in and around Ogdensburg and spent many winters in the poor house in Canton; his return to Ogdensburg on the St. Lawrence River in the spring was often celebrated by announcement in the local newspaper; and

WHEREAS, Author Lewis P. "Paul" Beers brought to attention Benjamin Christian's heroic actions in his award winning entry in Assemblywoman Addie A. E. Jenne's 2018 North Country Historical Writing Contest, being honored at a ceremony at the Potsdam Public Library on May 19, 2018; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the life and service of Benjamin Christian, an American patriot and hero; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Benjamin Christian, Lewis P. Beers, St. Lawrence County, Village of Canton, City of Ogdensburg, Town of Alexandria, Village of Sackets Harbor, Village of Morristown and Village of Clayton.