

State of Arkansas  
92nd General Assembly  
Regular Session, 2019

# A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1780

By: Representatives Della Rosa, D. Ferguson, Nicks

By: Senator K. Ingram

## For An Act To Be Entitled

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

### Subtitle

TO RECOGNIZE AND REMEMBER THE GREATEST  
MARITIME DISASTER IN UNITED STATES  
HISTORY.

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

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

1-5-117. Sultana Disaster Remembrance Day.

(a) The General Assembly finds that:

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**APPROVED: 4/8/19**