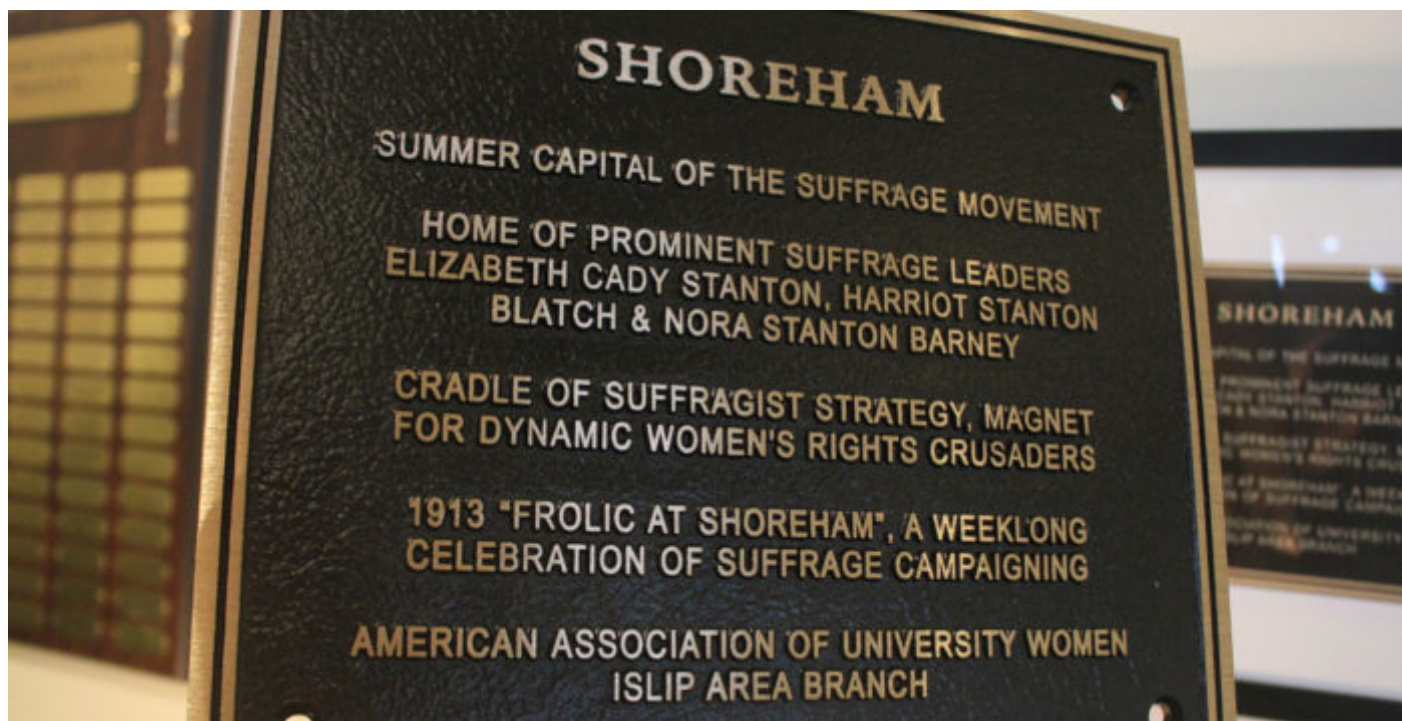


Shoreham receives suffrage movement recognition

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by Kevin Redding - April 5, 2017



A copy of the plaque that Shoreham Town Hall and homeowners of suffrage movement homes will receive to serve as markers along the Suffrage Trail. Photo by Kevin Redding

Long Island women who cast their votes this past election have a nearby town to thank.

Shoreham, an epicenter of women's rights activism in the years leading up to the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920, will be the first stop on a planned trail that will trace the rich history of the women's suffrage movement on Long Island.

In recognition of this, an enthusiastic group of local leaders, community members and dignitaries packed into the Shoreham Village Hall April 1 to witness the official establishment of the Long Island Suffrage Trail.

The ambitious project will allow residents to visit different sites across the region that have a history with the women's suffrage movement.

The plan is that, in a few years' time, a map of these marked sites will be available at public libraries and rest stops so people can embark on a history tour in their own backyard.

At home base is Elizabeth Cady Stanton – a leading figure whose “Declaration of Sentiments” in 1848 served as the foundation on which all women's rights movements ever since were built – and several generations of her family.

“We wanted to start a trail in the most auspicious place we could and, we decided, there’s no better place than Shoreham,” said Nancy Mion, vice president of the Islip branch of the American Association of University Women, the organization behind the trail.

“We’re so fortunate that on Long Island, in Shoreham, we are a hotbed of people involved in the movement,” she said. “If we’re going to start, we might as well start at the top ... and after years of dreaming and hoping, it’s real. We’re going to educate individuals and continue the history of women. We’re very proud.”

It was in 2012 that Mion and fellow AAUW members, including its president Susan Furfaro, first got the ball rolling on the project.

At the organization’s New York State convention, Coline Jenkins, the great-great-granddaughter of Stanton and a municipal legislator, proposed a challenge to the branch to investigate historical events of the movement and set up a local trail.

Jenkins herself gave a testimony in 2009 before the U.S. Senate that contributed to the creation of a suffrage trail at the national level.

Members of the Islip branch soon delved into back issues of Suffolk County newspapers as well as old publications and documents, and wound up setting their sights on Shoreham, with the help of the town’s historian Mimi Oberdorf.

The group got a surprise recently when it received a metro grant from its organization, the money from which will fund plaques and markers to be installed at the trail’s historic sites.

“We’ll be applying for the grants each year, so if we can average two to three sites a year, in six years, we’ll have enough to make a map and that’ll be when we’ll finally have a complete trail,” Furfaro said.



Coline Jenkins, the great great granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton — a leading figure whose “Declaration of Sentiments” in 1848 served as the foundation on which all women’s rights movements ever since were built — speaks during the ceremony. Photo by Kevin Redding



Event attendees listen to speakers discuss the importance of Shoreham during the suffrage movement. Photo by Kevin Redding

The first four plaques made were presented at the ceremony, one to be hung inside village hall and the other three to be hung outside nearby homes that were occupied at one time by Stanton and her relatives.

Shoreham Mayor Edward Weiss, who accepted the plaque on behalf of the village — which deemed Shoreham “the summer capital of the suffrage movement” — said he was honored by the recognition. The plaque will hang at the entrance of the building. The specific spot where it’s to be installed had been decorated by a paper version for the time being.

“Our thinking is that if you’re going to honor us with the unveiling of this plaque today, we should at the same time honor you by unveiling what will be its — or should I say, her — permanent location,” he said to Mion and Furfaro, who were dressed in Victorian clothing and wore large “Votes For Women” ribbons.

Brookhaven Town Councilwoman Jane Bonner (C-Rocky Point) took to the podium to congratulate the town and thank Stanton and all those involved in the suffrage movement.

“Were it not for Susan B. Anthony [and Stanton] I would not be able to have my role as council representative today,” Bonner said. “How fortunate and blessed are women in the United States to have the right to vote and hold office today? I do believe, one day, in our lifetime, we will have a female president.”

Legislator Sarah Anker (D-Mount Sinai) echoed Bonner’s sentiments, adding women still have a lot for which to fight.

“When I was young, we were taught to be quiet, to listen, to do what we were told, and not go and conquer our dreams,” Anker said. “We need to change that, and I see here today that we are changing that. We need to continue to support our girls.”