
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 108 Session of
2019

INTRODUCED BY FIEDLER, MARCH 5, 2019

INTRODUCED AS NONCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION UNDER RULE 35,
MARCH 5, 2019

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and substantial accomplishments of artist
2 Violet Oakley to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on the
3 100th anniversary of the Pennsylvania Senate murals.

4 WHEREAS, On June 10, 1874, Violet Oakley was born in New
5 Jersey into a family of artists; and

6 WHEREAS, Violet Oakley was a third-generation artist who
7 would come to embody the spirit of success as a celebrated mural
8 painter, stained glass designer and printmaker; and

9 WHEREAS, As a teenager, she studied painting in France, as
10 well as the Art Students' League of New York; and

11 WHEREAS, Violet Oakley's father was a successful investment
12 banker who provided his family with a privileged lifestyle and
13 supported his daughter's artistic and cultural pursuits; and

14 WHEREAS, The Panic of 1893, the worst economic depression the
15 country had experienced at that time, greatly reduced the Oakley
16 family's financial circumstances and contributed to her father's
17 mental breakdown; and

18 WHEREAS, Due to the family's depleted finances and her

1 father's failing health, Violet Oakley and her mother were
2 forced to sell their home and move into a boarding house in
3 Philadelphia; and

4 WHEREAS, In 1895, at the age of 22 and despite her family's
5 financial circumstances, Ms. Oakley entered into a formal
6 training program for artists at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine
7 Arts (PAFA) in Philadelphia; and

8 WHEREAS, Upon her enrollment, she began to study under the
9 tutelage of Cecilia Beaux, an accomplished society portraitist
10 and the only female instructor at the academy; and

11 WHEREAS, Because the field of art was dominated by men, Ms.
12 Oakley and fellow female artists encountered a level of
13 skepticism; and

14 WHEREAS, By 1897, Ms. Oakley left PAFA and began to study
15 under the guidance of Howard Pyle at the Drexel Institute; and

16 WHEREAS, During her time at the Drexel Institute, Ms. Oakley
17 began receiving acclaim as a book and magazine illustrator, work
18 she had taken on as a means of supplementing her income while
19 supporting her mother; and

20 WHEREAS, Ms. Oakley painted in the Pre-Raphaelite style,
21 which is known for its use of brilliant hues, jewel tones and
22 depictions of scenes of strong, heroic women, often taken
23 directly from tales from antiquity; and

24 WHEREAS, In 1900, Violet Oakley successfully worked for
25 magazines including Collier's, McClure's and the Women's Home
26 Companion; and

27 WHEREAS, Around this time, she decided to leave the Drexel
28 Institute, further embarking on her artistic career by accepting
29 a series of commissions through which she would receive a level
30 of fame and recognition, which was publicly covered by the New

1 York Times; and

2 WHEREAS, It is thought that Ms. Oakley's success was due, in
3 part, to a large-scale commission in which she was designated as
4 the principal designer for murals, mosaics and stained glass at
5 the All Angels Church in New York City; and

6 WHEREAS, With her growing fame and through the completion of
7 her first large-scale work at All Angels Church, Ms. Oakley
8 moved into the 18th century Red Rose Inn estate in Villanova,
9 Pennsylvania, with her mother and fellow female artists
10 Henrietta Cozens, Elizabeth Shippen Green and Jessie Wilcox
11 Smith; and

12 WHEREAS, While living at the Red Rose Inn, Ms. Oakley and her
13 fellow female artists worked diligently in their studio, further
14 honing their artistic styles; and

15 WHEREAS, Having seen her work at All Angels Church, Joseph
16 Huston, architect of the Pennsylvania State Capitol, promptly
17 commissioned Ms. Oakley for a panoramic mural for the Governor's
18 Reception Room that would depict the "Founding of the State of
19 Liberty Spiritual"; and

20 WHEREAS, In preparation for the commission, Ms. Oakley
21 traveled abroad, studying frescoes in Italy and researching the
22 life and events that led William Penn to immigrate from England
23 due to his views on religious tolerance; and

24 WHEREAS, When chief muralist for the Pennsylvania State
25 Capitol, William Austin Abbey, died in 1911, Violet Oakley was
26 commissioned to complete the remaining murals for the
27 Pennsylvania State Senate Chamber and the Pennsylvania Supreme
28 Court room; and

29 WHEREAS, Ms. Oakley was awarded the commissions for a sum of
30 \$100,000, nearly \$2.5 million in current value; and

1 WHEREAS, From 1911 until 1920, Ms. Oakley painted several
2 murals as part of a series titled "The Creation and Preservation
3 of the Union" for the Pennsylvania Senate Chamber; and

4 WHEREAS, It has been said that Ms. Oakley united the fine and
5 decorative arts through her unique style, which was based on the
6 revived ideals and practices of the Italian Renaissance; and

7 WHEREAS, While she was painting the murals for the
8 Pennsylvania Senate Chamber, World War I began, which directed
9 her interests and art from national sentiments to international
10 interests and subjects; and

11 WHEREAS, Through the inspiration she felt for the League of
12 Nations and the concepts of international law, she executed her
13 final commission in the Pennsylvania State Capitol by combining
14 images and letters to create imagery that was reminiscent of an
15 illuminated manuscript; and

16 WHEREAS, Upon the successful completion and installation of
17 the Pennsylvania Supreme Court room murals in 1927, Ms. Oakley
18 traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to paint the portraits of
19 individuals who were directly involved in the creation of the
20 League of Nations; and

21 WHEREAS, In addition to being an artist, Ms. Oakley was
22 active in the womens' suffrage movement and spent much of her
23 time focusing on using imagery as a means of uniting Americans
24 of different political idealism; and

25 WHEREAS, She later returned to Philadelphia where she
26 continued to enjoy a prosperous career through the completion of
27 many private commissions as well as a series of paintings
28 depicting delegates to the recently established United Nations;
29 and

30 WHEREAS, Violet Oakley died on February 25, 1961, in

1 Philadelphia; and

2 WHEREAS, Her personal aspirations and determination drove her
3 onward to become one of the most celebrated female muralists in
4 American history; therefore be it

5 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor the life
6 and substantial accomplishments of artist Violet Oakley to the
7 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on the 100th anniversary of the
8 Pennsylvania Senate murals.