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DAR Erects Plaque Honoring Suffragists

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The Fairfax County Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) unveiled a historical marker at the Occoquan Workhouse on Nov. 15, 2009, honoring the suffragists who were imprisoned there in 1917, at least one of whom was a member of the DAR. The date was the 92nd anniversary of the infamous Night of Terror, when the women received some of the harshest and most brutal treatment meted out to the suffragists. They claimed to be political prisoners and had refused to give their names or don striped prison garb. A contingent of United States Marines was called up from Quantico at the time to provide a perimeter around the Workhouse to ensure that no visitors could enter.

The marker was installed on a building scheduled to become the permanent home of a museum in the second phase of renovation of the Workhouse Arts Center. The museum, which includes both the prison and suffragist stories, is now housed in a temporary location at the center.

The dedication ceremony opened with an impressive presentation of colors by the Color Guard of the Virginia Sons of the American Revolution dressed in period costume. Speakers praised the courage and patriotism of the suffragists and noted that the message of what they accomplished has been somehow lost in the annals of history today. Special guest speakers included Gerry Connolly, member of the U.S. House of Representatives; Kate Hanley, secretary of the Commonwealth; Jennifer Krafchik, Sewall-Belmont House & Museum and Irma Clifton, Lorton Arts Foundation. Sharon Mason, executive director of the Lorton Arts Center, and Deborah Robison, chairman of the Fairfax County History Commission, accepted the marker on behalf of the arts center and the county.

Serving as master of ceremonies, Ellen vanHully-Bronson, chapter regent, read the text to those attending as the marker was unveiled.

The event attracted a crowd under the tent on the Workhouse quad and at a reception following the dedication.

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