



**Pam Elam, President
Monumental Women
Women's Rights Pioneers Monument
Unveiling Ceremony Speech
August 26, 2020**

We are here to move history forward and not even a pandemic can stop us. It's not often that you have the chance to be part of something truly historic. So, let's make the most of it by redefining history to include all of us, by understanding that history is all round us and that we are all historians trying to re-think the past in order to reshape the future. For what we all seek is nothing less than a full and fair historical record that reflects and respects the contributions of all women and people of color. We won't stop until we win that. But today - we celebrate!

Monumental Women is proud that our all-volunteer, not-for-profit group has broken the bronze ceiling in New York City's Central Park. It has taken seven years. We have raised over \$1.5 million in private funding. We have fought through many obstacles. But today our Women's Rights Pioneers Monument honoring Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton will be unveiled as the first statue of real women in Central Park's 167-year history. The 42-million people who visit Central Park each year already see statues of Alice in Wonderland, Mother Goose, and Juliet (with Romeo of course) as well as statues of witches, nymphs and angels. But no statues of real women existed - until now. Real women are no longer invisible here. The long wait is over. It is not, however, the first, nor will it be the last, time women have waited for basic equality and justice despite our never-ending activism to achieve that.

As you know, August 26, 2020 is the centennial anniversary of the ratification and certification of the 19th "Votes For Women" Amendment to the United States Constitution. The banners held at the White House by the silent sentinels of the National Woman's Party in 1917 said "How Long Must Women Wait For Liberty?" It is a question women around the world still ask. It was a question that Truth, Anthony, and Stanton asked as well. They were all New Yorkers and contemporaries fighting for equality and justice. They often spoke on the same stages and attended the same meetings. It is only fitting that they share the same pedestal. But creating the Women's Rights Pioneers Monument is only one of the goals of Monumental Women. In addition, we seek to increase awareness and appreciation of Women's History

through our Education Campaign as well as our Challenge to Municipalities across the nation and the world. We issue that challenge today. We urge all cities to re-imagine their public spaces to include tributes to the diverse women who helped create and inspire them. Little did we know that over the past seven years we would have to constantly challenge our own municipality as well.

But we have persisted. We thank our wonderful sculptor Meredith Bergmann. We are grateful for every contribution - large or small - from our many friends. Heartfelt thanks go to the New York Life Insurance Company for its extremely generous challenge grant, to the Ford Foundation, the Jane Walker Campaign, and other businesses and foundations you will hear about later in this program. We sincerely appreciate the money donated from cookie sales by Girl Scout troops 3484, 3482, and 3746 as well as bake sale contributions from children at the Brooklyn Mary McDowell Friends School. We received donations from over 1,000 supporters. Thanks to everyone. But as important as the financial contributions, were the expressions of support and encouragement we received from all over the country. We sincerely thank you for your kind words and meaningful messages.

It is not easy to donate a Work of Art to the City of New York. It was not easy to take the long and bumpy bureaucratic roller-coaster ride which traveled through the Parks Department, the Central Park Conservancy, The Public Design Commission, The Landmarks Preservation Commission and every single Community Board surrounding Central Park. Through this ride we had the strong support of Manhattan's great Borough President Gale Brewer. We can't thank Gale enough. We also thank Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver. Step by step, meeting by meeting, argument by argument, we crossed the minefield which is New York City government. With the help of our project management team from the highly respected firm of Beyer Blinder Belle and our wonderful pro bono attorneys we made progress. With hard work from our Board of Directors, additional support from the public, and more attention from the media, Monumental Women succeeded in gaining all the approvals and winning the fight. As we are often reminded, it does take a village to achieve a cherished goal or in this case, it takes a metropolis.

In New York City's public spaces there are 150 statues and only 5 of them are women. Now, thanks to Monumental Women there are 6. For those of you who might think that the work of Monumental Women is done, I can assure you that we are here to stay. We have many other projects, and statues, in mind. So stay tuned...

There are two themes I hope you will take away with you after you view this beautiful work of art today: The Power of Women's History and The Power of Voting. Through the "gift" of Women's History, we discover an historical treasure chest, overflowing with the stories of

women who serve to inspire and energize us. We learn of their strategies and tactics in the battle for equality. We learn of their courage and their imperfections. We look at the totality of their lives. We build on their work. We honor their memories. We vow to complete their journeys. A knowledge of Women's History helps us understand the context of the struggle for equality as well as the continuum of the fight for social change. We re-think the past to re-shape the future. And we must not wait any longer. We demand and will continue to fight for full equality for women in our lifetimes.

On Women's Equality Day, we think about the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and how hard generations of women had to fight for it. Yet we know that was only the first step toward getting and keeping the right to vote. Let us honor all of those women, those whose names we know and those whose names we may never know, and assure them that we will forever fight to protect that right to vote for all of us. Let us assure them that in every election especially this November, we will vote like democracy depended on it, because it does. We owe it to those who came before us to keep Moving History Forward. They would expect that of us. One statue in one park can light a fuse that sparks the imagination and ambition of a child who sees herself in that statue. That one statue can start a chain reaction leading to an explosion of knowledge and possibilities. Monumental Women is proud to light that fuse today. Thank you all.

It is my pleasure to introduce Manhattan's great Borough President and our wonderful friend, Gale Brewer.