



HISTORY OF MEMORIAL DAY

This document is to develop instructional information on the meaning and significance of Memorial Day.

Memorial Day, which falls on the last Monday of May, commemorates the men and women who died while serving in the American military.

Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day because it was a time set aside to honor the nation's Civil War dead by decorating their graves. It was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers, by proclamation of General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of former sailors and soldiers. On May 5, 1868, Logan declared in General Order No. 11 that: *The 30th of May, 1868 is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land. In this observance no form or ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit.*

During the first celebration of Decoration Day, General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery, after which 5,000 participants helped to decorate the graves of the more than 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried in the cemetery.



In 1966, the federal government, under the direction of President Lyndon Johnson, declared Waterloo, N.Y., the official birthplace of Memorial Day. They chose Waterloo- which was first celebrated on May 5, 1866-because the town had made Memorial Day an annual, community-wide event during which businesses closed and residents decorated the graves of soldiers with flowers and flags.

By the late 1800s, many communities across the country began to celebrate Memorial Day. After World War I, observances also began to honor those who died in all of American's wars. In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday in May.

Today, Memorial Day is celebrated at Arlington National Cemetery with a ceremony in which a small American flag is placed on each grave. Also, it is customary for the president or vice-president to give a speech honoring the contributions of the dead and lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. About 5,000 people attend annually.



Memorial Day is for Americans to offer tribute and honor to the heroes who laid down their lives to preserve freedom. Memorial Day is also an event when friends and families gather together and celebrate the holiday.

Webliography

History of Memorial Day <http://www.history.com/topics/memorial-day-history> . This website offers videos of the History of Memorial Day and other Memorial Day Tributes. One can find speeches made by Presidents, images of memorials and celebrations of the Memorial Day Holiday.

Memorial Day History <http://www.usmemorialday.org/backgrnd.html> . This website provides a background and an overview of Memorial Day with other sources and related links.

<http://www.pbs.org/memorialdayconcert/meaning> is a website that shows a National Memorial Day Concert, which is an annual event since 1979. The purpose of the concert is to unite the country in remembrance and appreciation for the fallen and those who are grieving.

Teacher guide to Memorial Day activities, lessons, and class ideas. Free lesson plans, printables and worksheets. <http://www.teach-nology.com/themes/holidays/memorialday>

<http://www.theteacherscorner.net/seasonal/memorial-day> Memorial Day lesson plans, activities and other seasonal information.

http://www.educationworld.com/holidays/archives/memorial_day.shtml Memorial Day lesson plans, activities and additional resources.