



# MEMORIAL DAY

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED OUR COUNTRY

**MEMORIAL DAY WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED DECORATION DAY.** It was a day set aside to honor both the Union and Confederate soldiers who died in the Civil War (1861-1865). People used the occasion to decorate their soldiers' graves.

Although there are stories of "grave decoration" days in all parts of the country, one of the first of national importance was in 1868 at Gettysburg, Pa., where both sides' armies fought a fierce battle in 1863 and where soldiers from both sides are buried. Five years later, people

from both the North and South came together at that place to honor their dead soldiers. Former enemies coming together to honor their dead was a sign that the nation might be healing from the Civil War.

Eventually, Decoration Day became known as Memorial Day and a time to honor all those who have died who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States. In 1971, the United States Congress passed a bill declaring the last Monday in May was to be called Memorial Day and it was to be a national holiday.

MEMORIAL DAY IS A NATIONAL HOLIDAY CELEBRATED THE LAST MONDAY IN MAY. FOR MANY, THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DAY IS THAT IT MARKS THE UNOFFICIAL BEGINNING OF SUMMER — CELEBRATED WITH PICNICS, SWIMMING PARTIES AND BASEBALL GAMES. SOME PEOPLE USE THIS DAY TO PUT FLOWERS AND OTHER DECORATIONS ON THE GRAVES OF LOVED ONES. HOWEVER, MEMORIAL DAY MEANS MUCH MORE.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Research in the newspaper how Memorial Day is observed in your community. Write a Letter to the Editor at your newspaper explaining the history of Memorial Day and commenting on how it is observed in your community.

The idea for Decoration Day came from Waterloo, New York, where the first commemoration was held May 5, 1866. Research this and the official proclamations recognizing Waterloo as the Birthplace of Memorial Day. What purpose do official proclamations serve?

## IN FLANDERS FIELD



"In Flanders Field, the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below."

— EXCERPTED FROM 1915 POEM BY CANADIAN ARMY COL. JOHN MCCRAE.

## THE MEMORIAL DAY POPPY

The poppy has been used as a symbol of remembrance since the First World War.

After the horrific battles, the soil had been disturbed and red field poppies began blooming. Field poppy seeds can lie dormant for years. A soldier noticed the poppies blooming and penned a poem that was later published in an English newspaper.

Moina Michael, inspired by the poem, "In Flanders Field," wore a red poppy on Memorial Day to honor those who died serving the nation during the war and began selling poppies to raise money to benefit servicemen in need. Her efforts inspired a French woman to start a similar effort, making artificial poppies and selling them to support war orphaned children and widowed women. This tradition spread to other countries.

Shortly before Memorial Day in 1922, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) organized nationwide distribution of artificial poppies in America. Other groups joined the effort, including the American Legion Auxiliary.

Today, remembrance poppies are assembled by disabled veterans and sold on Memorial Day to raise money to support veteran's welfare programs.