

A Step Back in Time By Bobbie Sue Shelton-Lonas

Memorial Day – A United States federal holiday observed on the last Monday of May. Formerly known as Decoration Day, it commemorates U. S. Soldiers who died while in the military service. First enacted to honor Union and Confederate soldiers following the Civil War, it was extended after World War I to honor Americans who have died in all wars.

By 1865 the practice of decorating soldiers had become widespread in the North. The first known observance was in Waterloo, New York on May 5, 1866, and each year thereafter. The friendship between General John Murray, a distinguished citizen of Waterloo and General John A Logan, who helped bring attention to the event nationwide, was likely a factor in the holiday's growth.

In 1868, General John A. Logan, in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of Republic (the organization for Northern Civil War veterans) established Decoration Day as a time for the nation to decorate the graves of the war dead, with flowers. General Logan declared that Decoration Day should be observed on May 30. His reason for this date has been debated. It is recorded that the date was chosen because flowers would be in bloom all over the country. Another source records it was chosen because it was not the anniversary of a battle.

The first large observance was held that year at Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington D. C. The ceremonies centered around the mourning-draped veranda of the Arlington mansion, once the home of General Robert E. Lee. Various Washington officials, including Gen. and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant, presided over the ceremonies. After speeches, children from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphan Home and members of the Grand Army of Republic made their way through the cemetery, strewing flowers on both Union and Confederate graves, reciting prayers and singing hymns.

Today, cities in both, North and South, claim to be the birthplace of Decoration (Memorial) Day. Macon and Columbus, Georgia, claim the title, as well as Richmond Virginia. A stone in a Carbondale, Illinois cemetery carries the statement that the first Decoration Day ceremony took place there on April 29, 1866. Carbondale was the wartime home of General Logan. Approximately 25 places have been named in connection with the origin of Memorial Day, many of them in the South where most of the war dead were buried.

In 1966, the official birthplace of Decoration Day was declared, by Congress and President Lyndon Johnson, to be Waterloo, New York. The observance, held 100 years earlier on May 5, 1866, was recorded as the first Decoration Day honoring local veterans, who had fought in the Civil War. Businesses closed and residents flew flags at half-staff. Supporters of Waterloo's claim say earlier observances in other places were either, informal, not community-wide or one-time events.

Although the holiday is still often referred to as "Decoration Day", "Memorial Day" was first used in 1882. It did not become more common until after World War II and was not declared the official name by Federal Law until 1967. On June 28, 1968, the Congress passed the uniform Holidays Bill, which moved three holidays from their traditional dates to a specified Monday in order to create a convenient three-day weekend. The holidays included Washington's Birthday, Veterans Day and Memorial Day. The change moved Memorial from its traditional May 30 date to the last Monday in May. The law took effect at the federal level in 1971.

Today, many Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries and memorials. A national moment of remembrance takes

place at 3 p.m. local time. Another tradition is to fly the flag of the United States at half-staff from dawn until noon local time. One of the longest-standing traditions is the running of the Indianapolis 500, an auto race which has been held in conjunction with Memorial Day since 1911. It runs on the Sunday preceding the Memorial Day holiday

Also, Memorial Day often marks the start of the summer vacation season and Labor Days its end.

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Flag Day

June 14th, do you recognize this important date? When you look at our American Flag, do you have a proud, patriotic feeling? Did you know that date is the birthday of our national flag? On June 14th, 1777, the Continental Congress proposed that the United States have a national flag, instead of the British Union Jack (nickname for the British Flag).

"Resolved, that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field representing a new constellation" (Marine Committee of the Second Continental Congress, June 14, 1777).

The American flag has changed designs more than any other flag in the world. There are many theories surrounding the birth of the "Grand Union", our nation's first flag. According to the one that seems most probable, Betsy Ross, an American seamstress, was called upon by three members of a Committee from the Continental Congress in May 1776. George Washington, Robert Morris and George Ross, asked Betsy to sew the first United States flag, which they had a design for.

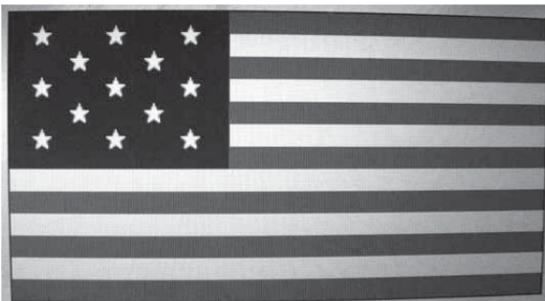
At the time, George Washington was the head of the Continental Army. Robert Morris was a very rich man, due to the large amount of land he owned, and George Ross was an all around, well known man from Philadelphia.

Supporting this theory are records from Betsy Ross giving the exact sequence of how things took place. As mentioned before, in May, she was contracted by the Committee and within a month or so, she completed what is now known as the first United States Flag. The flag consisted of thirteen stripes and thirteen stars forming a constellation, which stood for the first thirteen States of the Union.

A month later, the Declaration of Independence was read aloud for the first time. With the new flag and the Declaration of Independence, a new nation was born.

During the War of 1812 between the British and Americans, lawyer Francis Scott Key was escorting a prisoner to freedom by ship when he saw an American flag surviving a battle in Baltimore Harbor. The flag inspired him to write the poem which provides the words for the national anthem. The actual flag now hangs in the Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Today the "Star-Spangled Banner" is sung at large public gatherings such as sports events. Many television stations play the anthem before the station closes down for the night.

There were few public ceremonies honoring the Stars and Stripes until 100 years later, in 1877, when on, June 14, it was flown from every government building in honor of the centennial of the adoption of a national flag. Schools had unfurled American flags over their doors or outside the buildings long before this, but in 1890, North Dakota and New Jersey made a law



The Origin of Memorial Day - Flag Day And The Pledge of Allegiance

that required their schools to fly the flag daily. The first official Flag Day was observed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1893. New York also proclaimed June 14 as Flag Day 1897. Other states were slow to follow. The thought being, the day was too close to Memorial Day and Independence Day.

After much persistence and the support of many individuals, organizations, mayors, governors and five presidents, President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation requesting that June 14 become National Flag Day. In 1927 President Coolidge issued a second proclamation, and finally in 1949, that President Truman signed an Act of Congress designating June 14th of each year as National Flag Day.

Although Flag Day is not an official federal holiday for most states, on June 14, 1937, Pennsylvania became the first (and only) U.S. state to celebrate Flag Day as a state holiday.

Today, our national flag consists of thirteen equal horizontal stripes of red (top and bottom) alternating with white, with a blue rectangle bearing fifty small, white (five-pointed stars), arranged in nine offset

horizontal rows of six stars (top and bottom) alternating with rows of five stars. The fifty stars represent the 50 states and the 13 stripes

represent the original thirteen colonies that rebelled against the British monarchy and became the first states in the Union.

During National Flag Day this year, replace old flags if needed, show your pride and patriotism and fly "Old Glory", especially on its 234th birthday. It's also a time to remember and honor military men and women who defend our flag and our country.

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The Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance is one of the nation's most honored secular symbols, viewed by many in the same light as the National Anthem. While looking up the official meaning of PATRIOTISM, I found it printed several different ways, but the meaning of all of them can be put into 9 words: Patriotism is the love and devotion to one's country. As a child in the lower grades in school, one of the first things we did each morning was pledging our allegiance to the flag. In many cases, a different student was selected to lead the pledge, which was an honor.

The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America, originally composed in August, 1892 by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist Minister. The Pledge has been modified four times since then. The original pledge "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

In October 1892 the word "to" was added: "to the Republic for which it stands."

In 1923, the National Flag Conference called for the words "my Flag" to be changed to "the Flag of the United States", so that new immigrants would not confuse loyalties between their birth countries and the United States.

In 1924, only a year later, the words "of

America" were added, "the Flag of the United States of America.

Louis A Bowman, Chaplain of the Illinois Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, was the first to initiate the addition of "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. At a meeting, in 1948, Bowman led the Society in the Pledge with two words "under God" added. He stated that the words came from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Though not all manuscript versions of the Gettysburg Address contain the words "under God", all the reporters' transcripts of the speech as delivered do, as perhaps Lincoln may have deviated from his prepared text and inserted the phrase when he said "that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom. In 1951, the Knights of Columbus also began including the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. In New York City, on April 30, 1951, the Board of Directors of the Knights of Columbus adopted a resolution to amend the text of their Pledge of Allegiance at the opening of each of the meetings. Several attempts were made between 1948 and 1954 to have "under God" added to the Pledge, but failed.

On February 7, 1954, some American presidents honored Lincoln's birthday, which is February 12th, by attending services at the church Lincoln attended, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. With President Eisenhower sitting in Lincoln's pew, the church pastor, George MacPherson Docherty, delivered a sermon based on the Gettysburg Address titled "A New Birth of Freedom." He argued that the nations might lay not in arms but its spirit and higher purpose. He noted that the Pledge's sentiments could be those of any nation, that "there was something missing in the pledge, and that which was missing was the characteristic and definitive factor in the American way of life." He cited Lincoln's words, "under God" as defining words that set the United States apart from other nations.

President Eisenhower, though raised a Jehovah's Witness, had been baptized a Presbyterian just a year before. He responded enthusiastically to Docherty in a conversation following the service. Eisenhower acted on his suggestion the next day and on February 8, 1954, Rep. Charles Oakman introduced a bill to that effect. Congress passed the necessary legislation and Eisenhower signed the bill into law on Flag Day, June 14, 1954.

Over the years, many objections were raised after the addition of the phrase "under God". Critics contend that a government requiring or promoting this phrase violates protections against the establishment of religion, guaranteed in the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

On March 11, 2010, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upheld the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. The appellate court ruled that the words were of a "ceremonial and patriotic nature" and did not constitute an establishment of religion.

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

