MEMORIAL DAY
REMEMBER AND HONOR

MEMORIAL DAY HISTORY

Memorial Day is the last Monday of each May and is celebrated by Amercians in some form or other since the Civil War.

It is a federal holiday that honors and mourns American military personnel who died while performing their duties in service to the United States Armed Forces.

Memorial Day's rich history is worth revisiting.

Freed slaves honored Union soldiers who died

Freed slaves played a role in the establishment of Memorial Day.

The American Civil War is the deadliest military conflict in American history, as the Union and the Confederacy each suffered more than 800,000 casualties by the time the war ended in 1865.

According to History.com, as the war drew to a close, hundreds of Union soldiers who were being held as prisoners of war died and were buried in a mass grave in a Confederate prison camp in South Carolina.

After the Confederate surrender, more than 1,000 now-freed slaves honored those recently deceased Union soldiers during a ceremony in which they sang hymns and distributed flowers. The ceremony was dedicated to the fallen soldiers and served as a precursor to what is now celebrated as Memorial Day.

Ladies group honored Confederate dead

Confederate soldiers were honored, too; their losses during the Civil War outnumbered Union losses, and those losses were not forgotten by southerners who survived the war.

History.com notes that, in 1866, the Georgia-based Ladies Memorial Association, one of many similar organizations to arise in the aftermath of the war, pushed for a day to honor fallen Confederate soldiers.

Union graves decorated

Those efforts are believed to have influenced General John A. Logan for a Union remembrance. In 1868, General Logan, a Civil War veteran who was then serving as commander-in-chief of a group of Union veterans, ordered the decoration of Union graves with flowers on May 30. The day would ultimately be known as "Memorial Day."

Federal holiday established 1971

It took a long time for Memorial Day to become a federal holiday. Despite tracing its origins to the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Memorial Day did not become an official federal holiday until 1971, more than a century after the war ended.

It was officially designated to take place on the last Monday in May. The designation has periodically drawn the ire of veterans and military supporters who suggest it is now more widely seen as the unofficial beginning to summer and not a day in which the sacrifices of fallen U.S. soldiers are honored to the extent that they should be.

Towns with long history of Memorial Day

Debate exists about which town has the longest history of celebrating Memorial Day, with a handful of towns claiming that distinction.

History.com notes that Waterloo, New York, was officially recognized by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson as the birthplace of Memorial Day in 1966. Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and Rochester, Wisconsin aslo claim to have celebrated Memorial Day since the mid-1860s.

Regardless of it's origins, it is always right to take time for sombre reflection of the human toll of war, and to honor those who died in war.