

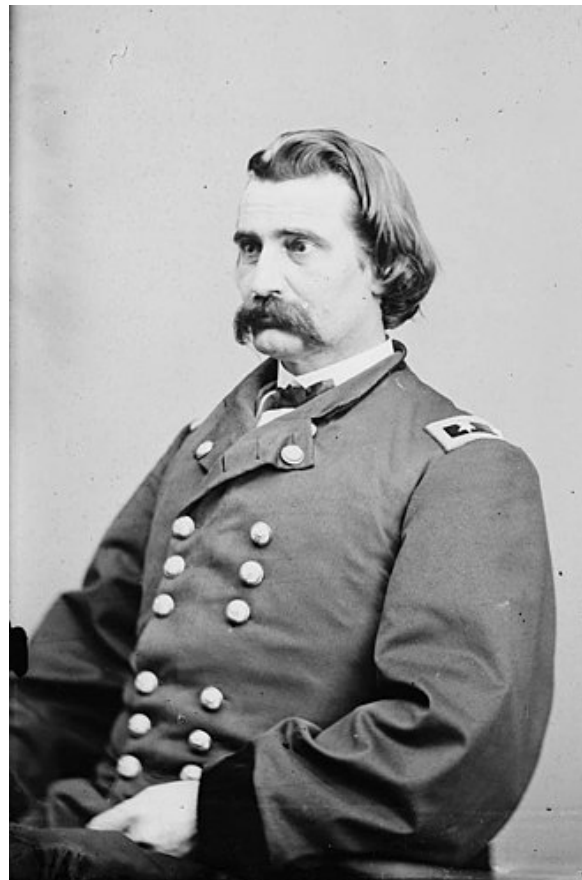


Newsletter  
May 2025

## A Brief History of Memorial Day

Do you sometimes wonder how a particular holiday got started, when, and by whom? Surely Hallmark can't be responsible for all of them.

The Memorial Day holiday is a good example of an idea becoming a tradition and then promoted until an actual holiday blossomed.



Union General and former Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), John Alexander Logan (above), is usually

credited with issuing a proclamation in 1868 calling for a national "Decoration Day". This proclamation called for a day to be observed annually and nationally. The day of appreciation for the sacrifices of the fallen soldiers killed in the recently ended American Civil War would be known as Decoration Day.



*Typical battlefield cemetery for soldiers recently killed in combat.*

Historical events, however, are rarely as simple as they first appear. The holiday today, as we have come to know as Memorial Day, is no exception. The origin for the idea came from family remembrances of soldiers killed during the American Revolution.

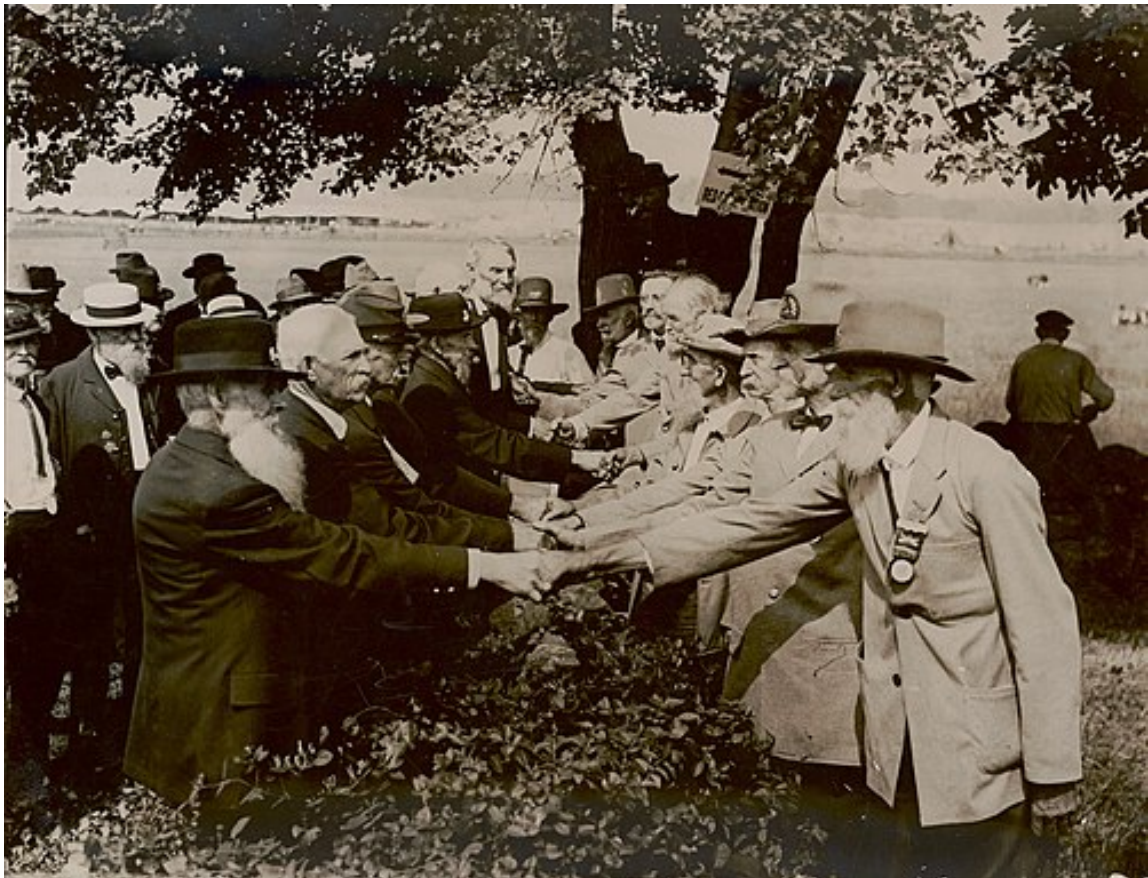


Revolutionary War cemetery with burial mounds in the distance

Early families began to coordinate gatherings in local cemeteries to honor loved ones lost in battle. Some of these gatherings became community events with picnics, music, and veteran reunions.



*Picnic day in 1890's.*



*Civil War veteran reunion at Gettysburg National Cemetery.*

They remained, however, purely local. Not until the American Civil

War did the idea of honoring the dead take on a national tone. President Abraham Lincoln dedicated the first National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 1863.



*President Abraham Lincoln (top-hatted figure in center) dedicating Gettysburg cemetery in 1863.*

Controversy arose as Southern states claimed the North had appropriated what had been a Confederate celebration. John Quincy Marr (below) was the first confederate soldier killed during the Civil War.



He was a true Son of the South who died at the Battle of Fairfax Court House in Warrenton, Virginia (below).



The date was June 1, 1861, and John Quincy Marr had the first Southern military grave decorated with flowers according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch in 1906 (below).

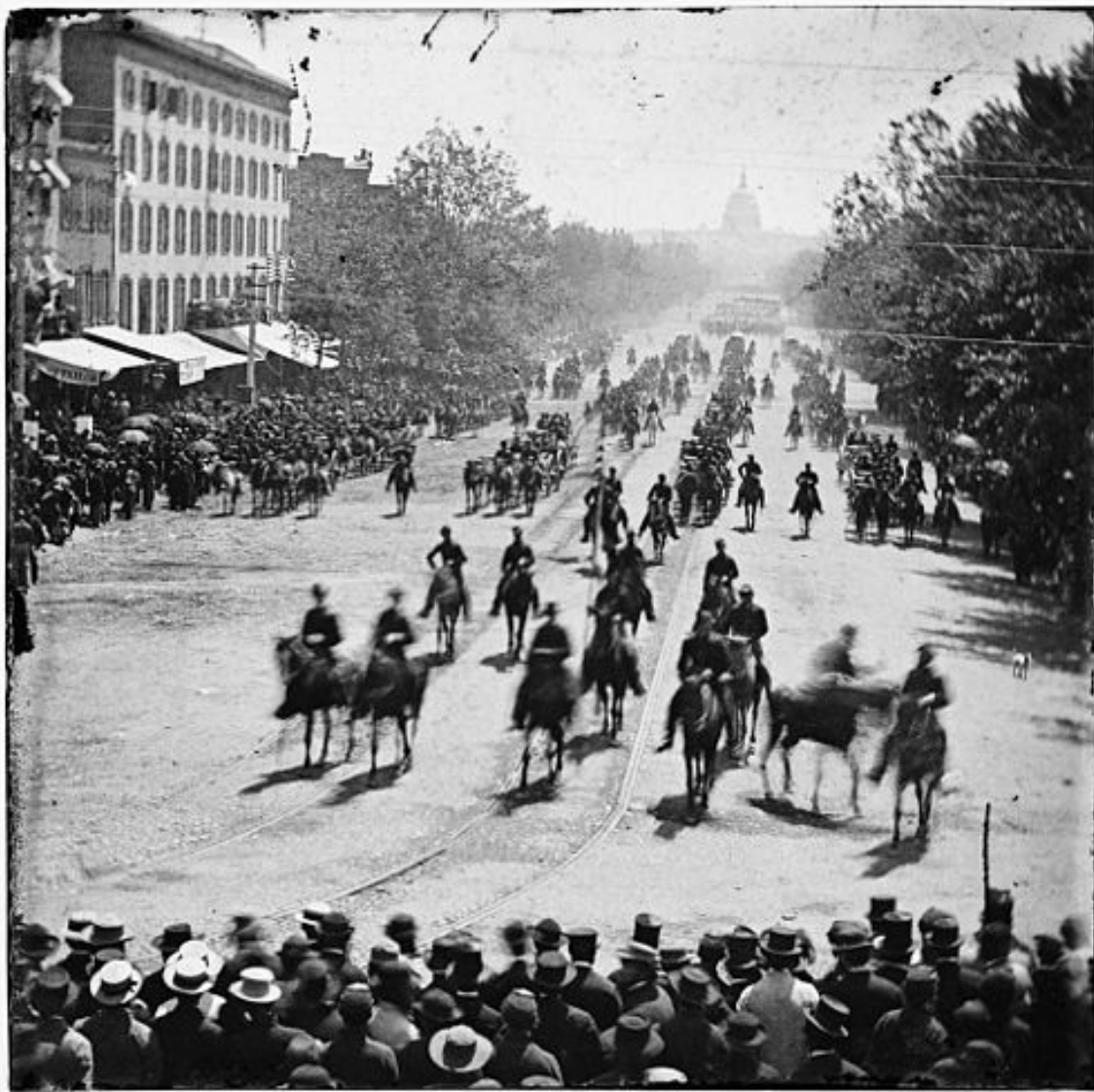


And with this began the great debate over which state originated the tradition. Besides Virginia, claims were made by Mississippi, South Carolina, and Georgia, all secessionist states supporting the Confederacy.



*Confederate cemetery in Mississippi.*

By 1865, Virginia, South Carolina, and Mississippi all had statewide precedents for Memorial Day long before observances in the North. After General Logan's proclamation, Northern states quickly adopted the holiday.

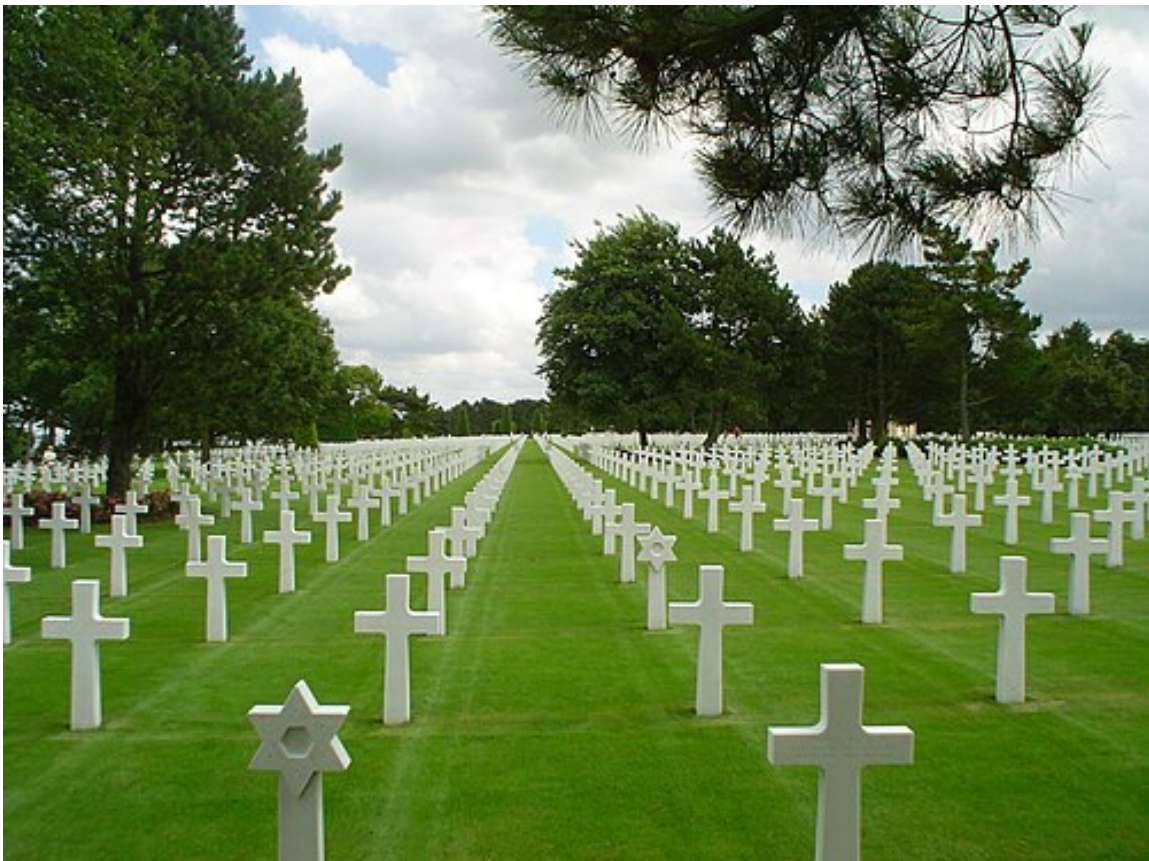


*Victory parade in Washington D.C., 1865, honoring war dead.*

This divide over the holiday continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with 10 states celebrating Confederate Memorial Day on June 3. June 3 is the birthday of former Confederate States President Jefferson Davis. By contrast, General Logan's wife noted the date of May 30 was chosen because it's the optimal time for flowers to be in bloom in the north.



In 1873, New York made Decoration Day an official State holiday. By 1890, every Northern state had followed suit. In 1913, a veteran complained that younger people born since the war had a tendency to forget the real purpose of Decoration Day. By mid-century, it was time to come together on a day of remembrance set aside for our fallen.



*American graves in Normandy, France.*

The name “Memorial Day” has gradually replaced “Decoration Day”

since World War II. It was made official by federal law in 1967.



*President Johnson at work.*

In 1968, Memorial Day and three other holidays were moved from their traditional dates to a specified Monday in order to create a three day weekend.

“Memorial Day” was here to stay – may we not forget.



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