



# MEMORIAL DAY

REMEMBER AND HONOR



First Presbyterian Church  
Fort Myers, Florida

2023

## The Birthplace of Memorial Day and Early Observances

The Civil War, which ended in the spring of 1865, claimed more lives than any conflict in U.S. history and required the establishment of the country's first national cemeteries.

By the late 1860s, Americans in various towns and cities had begun holding springtime tributes to these countless fallen soldiers, decorating their graves with flowers and reciting prayers.

It is unclear where exactly this tradition originated; numerous different communities may have independently initiated the memorial gatherings. And some records show that one of the earliest Memorial Day commemorations was organized by a group of formerly enslaved people in Charleston, South Carolina less than a month after the Confederacy surrendered in 1865. In 1966 the federal government declared Waterloo, New York, the official birthplace of Memorial Day. Waterloo—which first celebrated the day on May 5, 1866 - was chosen because it hosted an annual, community-wide event, during which businesses closed and residents decorated the graves of soldiers with flowers and flags.

On May 5, 1868, General John A. Logan, leader of an organization for Northern Civil War veterans, called for a nationwide day of remembrance later that month. "The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise 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," he proclaimed.

The date of Decoration Day, as he called it, was chosen because it wasn't the anniversary of any particular battle.

On the first Decoration Day, General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery, and 5,000 participants decorated the graves of the 20,000 Civil War soldiers buried there. Many Northern states held similar commemorative events and reprised the tradition in subsequent years; by 1890 each one had made Decoration Day an official state holiday. Southern states, on the other hand, continued to honor the dead on separate days until after World War I.

Memorial Day, as Decoration Day gradually came to be known, originally honored only those lost while fighting in the Civil War. But during World War I the United States found itself embroiled in another major conflict, and the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars, including World War II, The Vietnam War, The Korean War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For decades, Memorial Day continued to be observed on May 30th, the date General Logan had selected for the first Decoration Day. But in 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which established Memorial Day as the last Monday in May in order to create a three-day weekend for federal employees. The change went into effect in 1971. The same law also declared Memorial Day a federal holiday.



### ***Names Submitted of Fallen Heroes to Honor and Remember***

<a href="#">Sonny Ashburn</a>	Navy
<a href="#">John Boyle</a>	Air Force - Vietnam (Agent Orange)
<a href="#">Roland Evans</a>	S.C. Militia, American Revolution
<a href="#">Owen Hammerberg</a>	Navy - WW II, Pearl Harbor
<a href="#">Gene Henderson</a>	Navy - WW II, Prisoner of War
<a href="#">Jack F. Mellor</a>	Army - WW II
<a href="#">Larry Poet</a>	Marine Corps - Vietnam
<a href="#">George Simpson</a>	Air Force - WW II
<a href="#">Nelson Sotak</a>	Navy and Army
<a href="#">Guy C. Waldron</a>	Navy - WW II, Battle of Midway
<a href="#">James Withvon</a>	25th Virginia Infantry War between the States
<a href="#">Harold Wright</a>	Army - WW II (Italy)