

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 28, 2012

Memorial Day (1868–2012): I have always liked Memorial Day, also called Decoration Day in the past, because of what it stands for and the time of year in which it occurs. In the *Weekly News* of May 25, 2009, and May 30, 2011, I wrote about this solemn day and some remembrances I had of it. It is worth thinking back to how it all started.

There are stories of how women in the South began decorating graves of Confederate soldiers even before the War between the States had ended. At the conclusion of this war, it became mostly a northern holiday, first when soldiers' graves in the Quaker settlement of Waterloo, New York, were decorated in the mid-1860s. General John Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, proclaimed May 30, 1868, as the first nationally recognized Memorial Day, and flowers were placed on all the graves in Arlington National Cemetery. In 1873, New York became the first state to proclaim May 30 as a legal holiday, and by 1890 all northern states had done so. The southern states, realizing the new tradition applied mostly to fallen heroes of the North, ignored the holiday for the next 50 years.

In 1915, as World War I was raging in Europe, Moina Michael started the tradition of wearing red poppies, and in 1922, the VFW began selling artificial poppies as a fundraiser for disabled veterans, widows, and orphans. Realizing that this effort was nationwide and not simply to memorialize Civil War veterans, the southern states gradually celebrated May 30 along with the rest of the country. The tradition even spread to countries of western Europe that had suffered great human casualties during World War I.

In 1971, Congress passed legislation proclaiming the last Monday in May (whether May 30 fell during the long weekend or not) as a legal holiday so government employees could enjoy a three-day weekend. While it may not have been intended, the true meaning of Memorial Day and what it stood for was all but lost for millions of Americans. Realizing what had happened, Senator Inouye of Hawaii introduced a bill in 1999 to restore May 30 as the official Memorial Day. A similar bill was introduced in the House of Representatives. These bills have not been discussed or brought to a vote in either chamber.

The Memorial Day (May 28, 2012) Parade in Kennett Square terminates at Union Hill Cemetery on the north side of town. I should visit the cemetery, as I did several times on May 30 many years ago when my mother decorated graves. Many Marshalls are buried there, including Israel and Lizzie.