

Our National Memorial Day

Memorial days upon which the graves of the communities' heroes were decorated with flowers and garlands are ancient customs originating in Greece about 2,500 years ago.

Memorial days were set aside during the American Civil War in both the United States and the Confederate States of America.

Following the Civil War, various communities started having memorial services for their war dead. The City of Waterloo, New York was officially recognized as the place where the first memorial services were held after the Civil War.

However, **Petersburg, Virginia has a clear, unbroken, logical chain of events making it the inspiration for and origin of the National Memorial Day.**

In April 1866, a Union Army veterans' organization was founded by a chaplain and surgeon of the 14th Illinois Infantry Regiment. It was called The Grand Army of the Republic, commonly known as the GAR. General John Alexander Logan became the first Commander in Chief of the GAR, helped organize it and provided much of the inspiration, leadership and guidance, traveling across the country.

In March 1868, his wife, Mary Simmerson Cunningham Logan, came to Petersburg, although Gen Logan was unable to visit. Mrs. Logan provided a glowing report of her visit to the Blandford Cemetery to the General which inspired him to immediately begin the planning and writing of Grand Army of the Republic General Order No. 11, which was issued on May 5 1868. This general order was the document that established Memorial Day, or Decoration Day as it has been also called, as a nationwide Observance.

Mrs. Logan recounted her visit to Petersburg in her article published in the *Los Angeles Daily Times* dated May 30 1903 and later in a speech she delivered. Here is a quote from her article:

“...it is especially pleasant to know that the ideal of Memorial Day was unwittingly suggested by the devotion of the people of South to their heroes. In the early spring of 1868 I was one of a party...to make a pilgrimage to the battlefields of Virginia....”

We were in Petersburg, Virginia, and had taken advantage of the fact to inspect the oldest church there, the bricks of which had been brought from England. There was an old English air all about the venerable structure, and we passed to the building through a churchyard. The weather was balmy and spring-like, and as we passed through the rows of graves I noticed that many of them had been strewn with beautiful blossoms and decorated with small flags of the dead Confederacy. The sentimental idea so enwrapped me that I inspected them more closely and discovered that they were every one of soldiers who had died for the Southern cause. The actions seemed to me to be a beautiful tribute to the soldier martyrs and grew upon me while I was returning to Washington.”

She goes on to write that her husband, General Logan met her at the train station and she couldn't wait to tell him how she was moved by the graves of the Southern soldiers in the cemetery at Petersburg. She quoted him as saying after she finished her story: “What a splendid thought! We will have it done all over the country, and the Grand Army shall do it!”

And of course the General Order No. 11 is history. Today, this day of **October 9, 2009, the ladies/spouses of the Virginia Council of Chapters have visited that same Church and Cemetery of this City of Petersburg.**

Today, in this City of **Petersburg, We the members of this Virginia Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America, do hereby honor the service of our fellow members who have passed away by calling out their chapter's names in a sign of respect. We remember their sacrifices by placing a rose from one location to another, symbolizing their cross-over into the light where there is no pain, no hunger and no war.**