

Our City

By Emily Toma, 2014

Remember those who served before.
Remember those who are no more.
Remember those who serve today.
Remember them all on Memorial Day.

Memorial Day has come to mean the beginning of summer for many, a three day weekend, a time for picnics and barbecues, and a holiday to gather around the family. That happiness and freedom, however, came at a price a rare few are willing to pay. It is a product of the real cause for the holiday; the sacrifice made by men and women who have fought and died for the freedoms and liberties we as Americans hold dear. Memorial Day is a time to remember that the American way of life came at the price of those who sacrificed so all of us could live free today.

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in service of our country. Waterloo, N.Y. was officially declared the birthplace of Memorial Day by President Lyndon Johnson in May 1966, there is no conclusive origins as to the day. Regardless of the exact date, one thing is clear – Memorial Day was borne out of the Civil War and a desire to honor our dead. It was officially proclaimed on 5 May 1868 by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his General Order No. 11. “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 Union and Confederate soldiers buried there. It is now observed in almost every state on the last Monday in May with Congressional passage of the National Holiday Act of 1971 (P.L. 90 – 363). This helped ensure a three day weekend for Federal holidays.

So now we have our three day weekend, many in fact spend it with family, some in remembrance of those who served our country, yet others spend it with the memories of all their loved ones since passed. I will take some time Saturday to spend it with Dad, out on Spring Creek where he and I would fish together so many years ago. I sense him out there from time to time and I see his hand in my own as I cast to a fish I have no right to catch but somehow do. My memories are not among the many headstones of my family that precede me in death, they are in the open untrammelled lands and waters where they were all most at home and at peace. I hope to visit Floyd Johnson and Neil Andersen as they have left their earthly bonds. I hope to find them there with all my other memories wafting through the reds and oranges of Indian Paintbrush, the blues and violets of wild iris and the gold of the currant flowers as the week of Decoration Day always brings them to the banks of Spring Creek.

I hope you too found some time to visit those no longer with you, but part of you nonetheless. And, that you made the time to at least silently remember those who served before, remember those who are no more, remember those who serve today, remember them all on Memorial Day.

Until next week...