



“Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices.” – Harry S. Truman

Memorial Day this year marks the holiday’s 50th Anniversary. In observance of this day of remembrance, all bank branches will be closed Monday May 31, 2021.



Did you know that the National Moment of Remembrance Act is a law that asks Americans, wherever they are at 3pm (local time) on Memorial Day, to pause for a duration of one minute?

Memorial Day's 50 Year Anniversary

By Rebecca Sallee Staff writer RedStone Rocket

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May 31 marks the 50th anniversary of the official federal Memorial Day holiday. When the holiday was established in 1971, Richard Nixon was president, “Joy to the World” by Three Dog Night was the number one song, and hot pants were all the fashion rage.

In the years since that first official Memorial Day, now recognized on the last Monday in May each year, the long weekend holiday has come to represent the kickoff of summer, and a time to enjoy the first watermelon of the season and barbecues with families and friends.

It’s a happy occasion for most Americans. Swimming pools open. White shoes, shorts and pants come out of the closet. Many of us hit the road for a long weekend in the mountains or at the beach.

But the meaning of Memorial Day is somber, and on its 50th golden anniversary, we are reminded to turn our thoughts to those who died in the line of service to the country.

A statement issued by the U.S. Army office of the chief of public affairs calls Memorial Day “a day of national awareness and solemn reverence; a day for us to honor the military men and women who gave their lives in defense of our nation, its values, our freedoms and our liberties.”

While the official holiday is 50 years old, the origin of Memorial Day goes back much further.

Kaylene Hughes, historian at AMCOM, consulted the U.S. Army Center of Military History, and said the traditions of Memorial Day started in 1864, when women began placing flowers on the graves of their own relatives who died in the battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War.

The following year, Sue Landon Vaughn, a descendent of U.S. President John Adams, led women to Vicksburg, Mississippi to decorate the graves of Confederate soldiers. And in 1865, in Winchester, Virginia, members of the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Association began decorating all of the graves in the Confederate Cemetery, said to be the first of its kind.

The next year, women in Columbus, Mississippi visited “Friendship Cemetery” and placed flowers on the graves of soldiers from both sides of the war, those who died in the battle of Shiloh.

“Greeley’s New York Tribune printed a story on the unprejudiced acts of these women that led to widespread interest in impartial offering to the memory of the dead,” said Hughes. “It was seen as a healing touch for the nation.”

Numerous other groups began participating in similar services until 1868, when Memorial Day was first officially observed at Arlington National Cemetery.

Today, Soldiers from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, known as “The Old Guard,” place small American flags at every grave marker at Arlington and other cemeteries in honor of Memorial Day.

Congress established a national Memorial Day holiday in 1887 for government employees everywhere.

In 1966, the centennial anniversary of Memorial Day in New York was held after a congressman there claimed the first observation had taken place in the village of Waterloo 100 years earlier.

Finally, in 1971, Memorial Day was declared a federal holiday and the “Monday Holiday Law” was passed, changing the annual observation to the last Monday in May. In a 1971 proclamation and prayer for peace, Nixon reminded Americans of the purpose of the occasion.

“It is a tradition of our nation, as it is a tradition of most nations, to pay homage to those who have fallen in defense of our land, our people, and our principles,” said the president. “These men and women honor America by their sacrifice. It is for America to honor them by its devotion to those purposes for which they perished.”