

# The History of Memorial Day

Following the end of the Civil War, many communities set aside a day to mark the end of the war or as a memorial to those who had died. The cities included Charleston, South Carolina; Boalsburg, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; Carbondale, Illinois; Columbus, Mississippi; many communities in Vermont; and, some two dozen other cities and towns. These observances eventually coalesced around Decoration Day, honoring the Union dead, and the several Confederate Memorial Days.

According to Professor David Blight of the Yale University History Department, the first Memorial Day was observed in 1865 by liberated slaves at the historic race track in Charleston. The site was a former Confederate prison camp as well as a mass grave for Union soldiers who had died while captive. A parade with thousands of freed blacks and Union soldiers was followed by patriotic singing and a picnic.

The official birthplace of Memorial Day is Waterloo, New York. It was credited with being the birthplace because it observed the day on May 5, 1866, and each year thereafter, and because it is likely that the friendship of General John Murray, a distinguished citizen of Waterloo, and General John A. Logan, who led the call for the day to be observed each year and helped spread the event nationwide, was a key factor in its growth.

General Logan had been impressed by the way the South honored their dead with a special day and decided the Union needed a similar day.

Reportedly, Logan said that it was most fitting; that the ancients, especially the Greeks, had honored their dead, particularly their heroes, by chaplets of laurel and flowers, and that he intended to issue an order designating a day for decorating the grave of every soldier in the land, and if he could he would have made it a holiday.

Logan had the idea to make it a national holiday. On May 5, 1868, in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, a veterans' organization, Logan issued a proclamation that "Decoration Day" be observed nationwide. It was observed for the first time on May 30 of the same year; the date was chosen because it was not the anniversary of a battle. The tombs of fallen Union soldiers were decorated in remembrance of this day.

Many of the states of the U.S. South refused to celebrate Decoration Day, due to lingering hostility towards the Union Army and also because there were very few veterans of the Union Army who lived in the South. A notable exception was Columbus, Mississippi, which on April 25, 1866 at its Decoration Day commemorated both the Union and Confederate casualties buried in its cemetery.

The alternative name of "Memorial Day" was first used in 1882, but did not become more common until after World War II, and was not declared the official name by Federal law until 1967.

*Article reprinted from Wikipedia*

## A Memorial Day Tribute

Join Coral Springs' Mayor Scott Brook, Families of local military troops, Col. Lettie J. Bien of Fisher House, Col. Allen West and former NFL Chiefs and Redskins Running Back Donnell Bennett for an evening of fine art, fine music with fine wine, and a food and chocolate tasting to benefit The Fisher House ([www.fisherhouse.org](http://www.fisherhouse.org)), a not-for-profit organization helping military families, on:

**Wednesday, May 21, 2008**

**5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

**Coral Springs Museum of Art**

**2855 Coral Springs Drive**

**Coral Springs, Florida 33065**

**(Museum) 954-340-5000**

Special Feature: Military Photographic Art by Marc Gagnon who has collections in the Smithsonian, Presidential Libraries and the Pentagon in collaboration with Parkland resident retired Sergeant First Class Miguel Figueroa, who served in Iraq.

5% of the proceeds will benefit the Coral Springs Museum of Art.

For more information call 561-706-2586 or [www.csmart.org](http://www.csmart.org)

