

Forward, into the Past



Those We Remember... or Do We?

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As we celebrate Memorial Day this year with its parades, sales, closed government buildings, cemetery ceremonies, flowers and flags on graves, and speeches, few even know how or when Memorial Day began.

In the United States, the dead veterans of the nation's various wars have been honored on a secular holiday since the time of the Civil War. The location and date of the first ceremony paying tribute to the dead is disputed, but even before the war had ended, women in many communities of the South had begun the practice of placing flowers on the graves of fallen Confederate soldiers.

Spontaneous gestures of remembrance also took place in the North, as in the village of Waterloo, New York, which honored its war dead on May 5, 1866, by closing its businesses for the day, flying the flag at half-mast, decorating the graves of fallen soldiers, and holding other ceremonies at the three cemeteries in the area. In 1967 a proclamation by President Lyndon B. Johnson and a joint congressional resolution officially recognized Waterloo as "the birthplace of Memorial Day." (Waterloo's claim to priority is disputed by a number of other communities.)

General John A. Logan, the commander-in-chief of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic, an organization of Union veterans) issued an order to all G.A.R. posts in 1868: "The thirtieth day 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. In this observance no form of ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit." "It is the purpose of the commander-in-chief to inaugurate this observance with the hope that it will be kept up from year to year while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades."

The very next year there were more than 300 Memorial Day exercises and, in 1873, New York became the first state to designate May 30th a legal holiday. By 1890, it was a legal holiday in all the northern states. Today, Memorial Day is a federal holiday and a legal holiday throughout the nation. Of course, Memorial Day is no longer purely a Civil War event; it is an occasion for hon-

oring all those men and women who have died in the military service of the United States.

Somehow, through the years, it has expanded to include all our beloved dead – veterans, business people, homemakers, relatives, or friends. Graves are decorated with flowers, wreaths, and flags on and in advance of Memorial Day. On the day itself, flags fly at half-mast, and relatives and friends visit the final resting places of their loved ones. Memorial Day is the official title, but do you remember the "Decoration Days" of the past?

The date of Memorial Day is no longer fixed on the traditional May 30th. On June 28, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation shifting the dates of certain holidays to provide Americans with an increased number of three-day weekends. One provision of the new statute was that Memorial Day be observed on the last Monday of May every year. By chance, Memorial Day will be celebrated on May 30th in 2005, since the last Monday in May falls on that original date.

Ellenville residents will find many Civil War dead buried in the **Leurenkill Cemetery**, often called the "**Old Ellenville Cemetery**." A 1919 list of Civil War Veterans identified 68 graves dating back to the War Between the States, and includes such names as William Broadhead, Moses Burlison, Lieutenant George Brankstone, Louis Heroy, Captain William Lent, Henry Misner, John Rippert, Adam Smith, Adam Unverzagt (spelled Unverzagt), Calvin VanGorder, and George M. VanSchaick.

The **Leurenkill Cemetery** is one of the Town of Wawarsing's older cemeteries, dating back to 1838. Its history is rather interesting.

In the early years of the Town of Wawarsing, a family by the name of Haight had a farm in the Leurenkill area. David Haight (1801-1874) is reputed to have built the home now owned by the *Shawangunk Country Club*, but Katharine Terwilliger believed the house was built by David's father, Eburn, whose dates were 1774-1838. David Haight had three sons: another Eburn, Andries, and George; and 3 daughters: Caroline Haight Warren, Susan Haight Deyo, and Phebe J. Warren. An 1853 map shows this property marked D. Haight.

On September 3, 1838, Eburn Haight sold to the Trustees of the *Methodist Episcopal Church of Ellenville* for \$50 "land which is to be used as a Public Burial Yard for the Village of Ellenville and its Vicinity..." The land is described as beginning at the Northwest corner of Eburn Haight's farm and consists of approximately 1 acre 4 rods. The deed (Liber 51:423) specifically excludes a lot of about 4 rods where the wife of Thomas Ingstrom is buried, to be used by the Haight family as a burying lot.

Since some of the gravestones record burials earlier than 1838 (Henry Bartlett, 1807; Sarah Barrow, 1815; Henry Baldwin, 1831; Margaret Briggs, 1813; and Elizabeth Gerrad, 1814, among others), it is logical to

