

# LINCOLN LORE

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## DECORATION DAY

Mrs. Mary Logan Tucker, the last person who was present on the occasion when the idea of a national Memorial Day was conceived, has recently passed away in Washington, D. C. It is hoped that this coming thirtieth day of May will find her resting place covered with beautiful flowers as a memorial of a life-long interest in the custom of decorating the graves of the fallen members of the Grand Army of the Republic.

At the time of her death in March, Mrs. Tucker was president of the Dames of the Loyal Legion for the District of Columbia. The editor of *Lincoln Lore* had the privilege of speaking at the Legion's Annual Lincoln Breakfast in Washington on February 12 where Mrs. Tucker presided so graciously, although she was eighty-one years of age. It was an inspiration indeed to find oneself seated between Mrs. Tucker, the daughter of General Logan who was founder of Memorial Day, and Madame Caulacuzene, a granddaughter of General Grant.

In conversation at the breakfast table Mrs. Tucker spoke of her visit with her mother to Virginia in March 1868 and recalled seeing the graves of Confederate soldiers decorated with flowers. She then told the story found in her mother's book about this visit which gives a brief account of the incident out of which grew Memorial Day as we observe it. It follows in part:

"During this trip we visited the churchyards and cemeteries at Richmond, Petersburg, and other points made historic by the struggle which had taken place in and around these cities. In the churchyard near Petersburg we saw hundreds of the graves of Confederate soldiers. These graves had upon them small bleached Confederate flags and faded flowers and wreaths that had been laid upon them by loving hands on the occasion of their Decoration Day.

"Upon our return General Logan was much interested in our account of what we had seen and I remarked to him that I had never been so touched as I was by seeing the little flags and the withered flowers that had been laid on these graves. At this General Logan said that it was a beautiful revival of the custom of the ancients in thus preserving the memory of the dead, and that he, as commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, would issue an order for the decoration of the graves of Union soldiers."

Mrs. Tucker said that the family talked over the most appropriate time to gather flowers for decorating purposes, and as the season was of course much later in the north, it was thought the month of May would be most suitable.

Incidentally the funeral rites of Lincoln and the profusion of flowers which had been offered at the time of his long funeral procession across the country had made the people conscious of the appropriateness of floral tributes for their dead. The order which General Logan issued on May 5, 1868, called for the setting apart of May 30 as the national Decoration Day. The order follows:

Headquarters Grand Army of the Republic,  
Adjutant-General's Office, 446 Fourteenth St.,  
Washington, D. C., May 5, 1868.

General Orders  
No. 11

I. The 30th 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.

We are organized, comrades, as our regulations tell us, for the purpose, among other things, "of preserving and strengthening those kind and fraternal feelings which have bound together the soldiers, sailors, and marines who united to suppress the late rebellion." What can aid more to assure this result than by cherishing tenderly the memory of our heroic dead, who made their breasts a barricade between our country and its foes? Their soldier lives were the reveille of freedom to a race in chains, and their deaths the tattoo of rebellious tyranny in arms. We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no vandalism or avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations, that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided Republic.

If other eyes grow dull, and other hands slack, and other hearts cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as the light and warmth of life remain to us.

Let us, then, at the time appointed, gather around their sacred remains, and garland the passionless mounds above them with the choicest flowers of spring-time; let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor; let us in this solemn presence renew our pledges to aid and assist those whom they have left among us, a sacred charge upon a nation's gratitude—the soldier's and sailor's widow and orphan.

II. 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. He earnestly desires the public press to call attention to this order, and lend its friendly aid in bringing it to the notice of comrades in all parts of the country in time for simultaneous compliance therewith.

III. Department Commanders will use every effort to make this order effective.

By order of—

John A. Logan,  
Commander-in-Chief.

Official:

Wm. T. Collins, A. A. G.

N. P. Chipman,  
Adjutant-General.