

ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: Memorial Day

Every May, Americans observe Memorial Day; a day to remember those who have died in service to our country. In Elmhurst, there is a parade followed by a ceremony at the Veterans Memorial in Wilder Park.

Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, was a day set aside to decorate the graves of soldiers who had died in the Civil War. In 1868, General John A. Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, proclaimed in General Order 11 that: 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. 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."



Memorial Day parade entering Elm Lawn Cemetery on Lake Street at Melrose Avenue, 1920. M2013.1.52

Early Elmhurst newspapers tell of Memorial Day services in DuPage County that included parades, orations, memorial services, and views of the Civil War. *The Elmhurst Enterprise* reported, "Decoration Day was observed by many of our people at Chicago cemeteries." (June 3, 1898) Please note that Elmhurst's first privately owned cemetery did not open until 1901.

Decoration Day was later renamed Memorial Day, and soldiers of all wars, not just the Civil War, were honored. *The Elmhurst Press* gives a detailed account of the 1920 observance. Planned by the newly-formed Elmhurst Boosters Club, participants assembled at Hawthorne School at 9:30 a.m. The Elmhurst College band led a group that included "old soldiers," Spanish War veterans, soldiers of the late war (World War I), the Illinois Reserve Militia, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, college students, and school children, as they marched to Elm Lawn Cemetery. Upon arrival at the cemetery, they gathered for a program that included a prayer, speeches, music, and an address by Judge Sawin, the oldest veteran in Elmhurst. Then flowers were placed on graves of veterans.

In 1968, as part of the National Holiday Act, Congress passed legislation to change Memorial Day from May 30 to the last Monday in May effective in 1971. Through the years citizens of Elmhurst have continued to commemorate Memorial Day with a parade followed by a service at various locations: [cemeteries](#), York Community High School, Elmhurst College, and since 1993 at the [Veterans Memorial](#) in Wilder Park.

By Nancy Wilson, Elmhurst History Museum Staff, Updated October 2021