



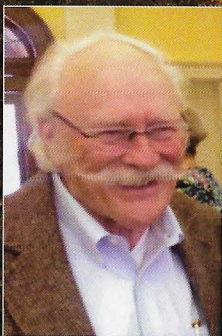
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Pathways TO THE FUTURE

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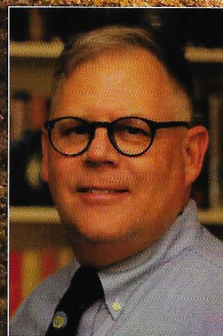
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The tradition of Decoration Day

By *Bobbie Smith Bryant* • *Shelby County Historical Society*

Since the early 1860s, Americans have celebrated what was originally known as Decoration Day. Organized by women to honor and remember those who died for during the Civil War, people began decorating their loved ones' graves each May 30. The history of the origin of this special recognition day comes with controversy, so there are two repositories housing research materials to help explain it.

In 1865, the military leaders of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Union organization, copied Southern (Confederate) observances, holding their respective ceremonies on different days. Eventually the celebrations merged as the country adopted the practice as a federal holiday and renamed it Memorial Day.

Shelbyville joined her sister communities to reflect upon these sacrifices with gratitude and remembrance. Shelbyville's very first Decoration Day was Sunday, May 29, 1887, at Science Hill Chapel.

The account was recorded in the *Shelby Sentinel* on Thursday, June 2, 1887, as follows:

The first of the Decoration Day services were held in Science Hill chapel Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock. The attendance was large, and the services were impressive as befitted the occasion. Rev. S. M. Neel delivered the address of the day, going at length into the causes of the war, its grand results and the noble lessons it taught. It was a speech worthy of the occasion and much enjoyed by the audience.

The following day was anything but auspicious for the proposed services, but the relatives, friends and surviving comrades of the soldier dead, were too much enthused with the mission on which they were bent to be deterred by rain.

At one o'clock the soldiers of both armies met in Petry's Hall, from which place they marched, at 1:30 o'clock, headed by O'Sullivan's band, to the Court House. There were seventy-five Veteran's in line, forty-five Union men and thirty Confederates. Each wore a badge of blue and grey, soldiers of the South and soldiers of the North marching arm in arm to commemorate the noble dead of each side.

At the Court House two eloquent addresses were delivered. Rev. B. F. Hungerford was the orator for the occasion and his speech was a masterpiece in its way. He happily struck the chord of his audience and voiced the feelings they would have expressed. His address was an eloquent and impartial tribute to the fallen heroes of that unfortunate strife. He was followed by Col. John McHenry, who was himself a gallant soldier and member of the



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17th Kentucky USA). He spoke more to a history of the struggle and the part played in it by Kentucky troops and especially by those regiments organized in the part of the state.

After the speeches the procession was again formed in line and all marched to the cemetery where the ceremony of placing flowers on the graves was performed. Through the kindness of the ladies of the county, flowers were furnished in the greatest profusion and every grave was heaped high with these beautiful tributes of love and remembrance. Below is given a list of the dead whose graves were decorated:

Joseph W. Lyle	Col. Marion C. Taylor
Greenberry Davis	Dudley Baker
J. J. Fawkes	John Sayles
J. B. Shindler	Wm. Orchard
Geo. Fate	Wm. Kelly
Isaac McArter	H. V. Leffler
J. R. Albien	J. R. Heaton
Sanford Procter	Wiley Cloud
Irvin Blue	Andrew Balfour
Isaac Heaton	S. T. Lay
David Owens	Thos. Cochran
Jas. A. T. McGrath	Will Middelton
H. B. Ross	Cyrus Findley
R. M. Robb	Lieut. W. C. Price
J. H. Price	Jacob F. Harris
John Murphy	J. B. Lewis
Patrick Rodgers	Robert Ryan
James Staples	Robt. K. Moore
Alex Logan	Col. Quin Morton
Barret W. Ballard	Joe Wilson
James Figg	Pierson Willis
John H. Waller	Lieut. Van Swearingen
Capt. C. S. Todd	Lieut. Wm. D. Dunlap
Major Whitaker	R. T. Whitaker
Fielding Neel	Mark Harden
John Baker	Dr. W. T. Kirk
Col. John Hardin	Adam M. Middleton
Wm. Adkins	Ralph Hickman
Henry Burnett	Abraham Smith
Jas. Hannon	

Memorial Day continues to be a day of remembrance, though when Memorial Day was moved from its traditional May 30 date to the last Monday in May, some argue that having three-day weekends has undermined the very meaning of the day. The law took effect at the federal level in 1971.