

CELEBRATE! HOLIDAYS IN THE USA

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Washington D.C. 20547

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Introduction

CELEBRATE! HOLIDAYS IN THE U.S.A. is an introductory survey of the historical and social background of American holidays.

People in every culture celebrate holidays. Although the word "holiday" literally means "holy day," most American holidays are not religious, but commemorative in nature and origin. Because the nation is blessed with rich ethnic heritage it is possible to trace some of the American holidays to diverse cultural sources and traditions, but all holidays have taken on a distinctively American flavor. In the United States, the word "holiday" is synonymous with "celebration! "

In the strict sense, there are no federal (national) holidays in the United States. Each of the 50 states has jurisdiction over its holidays. In practice, however, most states observe the federal ("legal or public ") holidays, even though the President and Congress can legally designate holidays only for federal government employees.

Ten holidays per year are proclaimed by the federal government. They are as follows:

<u>New Year's Day</u>	(January 1)
<u>Martin Luther King Day</u>	(traditional - January 15) (official - third Monday in January)
<u>Presidents' Day</u>	(traditional - February 12 & February 22) (official - third Monday in February)
<u>Memorial Day</u>	(traditional - May 30) (official - last Monday in May)
<u>Independence Day</u>	(July 4)
<u>Labor Day</u>	(first Monday in September)
<u>Columbus Day</u>	(traditional - October 12) (official - second Monday in October)
<u>Veterans' Day</u>	(traditional - November 11) (official - second Monday in November)
<u>Thanksgiving Day</u>	(fourth Thursday in November)
<u>Christmas Day</u>	(December 25)

In 1971, the dates of many federal holidays were officially moved to the nearest Monday by then-President Richard Nixon. There are four holidays which are not necessarily celebrated on Mondays: Thanksgiving Day, New Year's Day, Independence Day and Christmas Day. When New Year's Day, Independence Day, or Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, the next day is also a holiday. When one of these holidays falls on a Saturday, the previous day is also a holiday.

Federal government offices, including the post office, are always closed on all federal holidays. Schools and businesses close on major holidays like Independence Day and Christmas Day but may not always be closed, for example, on Presidents' Day or Veterans' Day.

Federal holidays are observed according to the legislation of individual states. The dates of these holidays, and others, are decided upon by each state government, not by the federal (national) government. Each state can agree on the same date that the President has proclaimed, such as

Thanksgiving Day. State legislation can also change the date of a holiday for its own special commemoration.

Waterloo, New York, for instance, always observes Memorial Day on May 30 rather than on the last Monday in May, as this was the original date on which Waterloo founded the commemoration. Cities and towns can decide not to celebrate a federal legal holiday at all. However, the majority of the states (and the cities and towns within them) usually choose the date or day celebrated by the rest of the nation.

There are other "legal" or "public" holidays which are observed at the state or local level. The closing of local government offices and businesses will vary. Whether citizens have the day off from work or not depends on local decisions. Some "legal" or "public" holidays are specific only to an individual state. For example, Nebraska always celebrates Arbor Day on April 22, the birthday of the originator of the holiday. Since Arbor Day originated as a treeplanting day, different states change the date depending on the best season for planting trees in their region: Hawaiians plant trees on the first Friday in November.

You can thumb through an ordinary calendar and discover many special days i.e. "minor holidays" which are observed by a relatively small number of people or by a particular interest group. For example, "Girl Scouts' Birthday" (March 12), "Citizenship Day" (September 17), "United Nations Day" (October 24) would have limited observance. "Hog Callers' Day" would have even less.

Events involving famous Americans, living or dead, have a wider appeal. Many Americans may have forgotten the exact date when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated (November 22, 1963), but they remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when they first learned about his tragic death. Other days commemorate events which may be personally significant for one generation but have less relevance for another. For example, Pearl Harbor Day (December 7) marks the day when Japanese Imperial Forces attacked Hawaii in 1941 and brought the US into World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his address to the nation referred to the attack as "a day that will live in infamy". Adults and children of the time have a personal recollection of the day. The younger generations of today may know of the event from their history books only.

Other holidays such as "Groundhog Day" (February 2) are whimsically observed, at least in the media. The day is associated with folklore which has grown up in rural America. It is believed, by some, if the groundhog, or woodchuck comes out of its hole in the ground and sees its shadow on that day it will become frightened and jump back in. This means there will be at least six more weeks of winter. If it doesn't see its shadow, it will not be afraid and spring will begin shortly.

Critics of the proliferation of holidays point an accusing finger at greeting card manufacturers and other entrepreneurs. The critics say that "Holiday X" is simply promoted to get people to buy their wares. "Secretary's Day", or "Grandparents Day" might fall into this category.

Obviously, no effort has been made to be comprehensive in treating all holidays that Americans would possibly celebrate. Only "major" holidays, recognized if not celebrated by Americans in general, have been included here. Each unit is introduced by a reading the passage about the background of the American holiday or celebration. When relevant, a speech, song, or poem pertaining to the holiday follows. There might be a special feature about the holiday, such as regional or religious factors which make the celebration different.

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New Year's Day

(January 1)

The beginning of the new year has been welcomed on different dates throughout history. Great Britain and its colonies in America adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752, in which January 1st was restored as New Year's Day. Ways of celebrating differ as well, according to customs and religions of the world. People in Moslem societies, for example, celebrate the new year by wearing new clothes. Southeast Asians release birds and turtles to assure themselves good luck in the twelve months ahead. Jewish people consider the day holy, and hold a religious ceremony at a meal with special foods. Hindus of India leave shrines next to their beds, so they can see beautiful objects at the start of the new year. Japanese prepare rice cakes at a social event the week before the new year.

Whatever the custom, most of people feel the same sentiment. With a new year, we can expect a new life. We wish each other good luck and promise ourselves to do better in the following year.

New Year's Eve (December 31)

In the United States, the federal holiday is January first, but Americans begin celebrating on December 31. Sometimes people have masquerade balls, where guests dress up in costumes and cover their faces with masks. According to an old tradition, guests unmask at midnight.

At New Year's Eve parties across the United States on December 31, many guests watch television as part of the festivities. Most of the television channels show Times Square in the heart of New York City. At one minute before midnight, a lighted ball drops slowly from the top to the bottom of a pole on one of the buildings. People count down at the same time as the ball drops. When it reaches the bottom, the new year sign is lighted. People hug and kiss, and wish each other "Happy New Year!"

New Year's Day

On January first, Americans visit friends, relatives and neighbors. There is plenty to eat and drink when you just drop in to wish your loved ones and friends the best for the year ahead. Many families and friends watch television together enjoying the Tournament of Roses parade preceding the Rose Bowl football game in Pasadena California. The parade was started in 1887, when a zoologist who had seen one in France suggested to the Valley Hunt Club in Pasadena, California that they sponsor "an artistic celebration of the ripening of the oranges" at the beginning of the year. At first the parade was a line of decorated horse-drawn private carriages. Athletic events were held in the afternoon, and in the evening, a ball where winners of the events of the day and the most beautiful float were announced. In later years colleges began to compete in football games on New Year's Day, and these gradually replaced other athletic competitions. The parade of floats grew longer from year to year, and flower decorations grew more elaborate.

The theme of the Tournament of Roses varies from year to year. Today the parade is usually more than five miles long with thousands of participants in the marching bands and on the floats. City officials ride in the cars pulling the floats. A celebrity is chosen to be the grand marshal, or official master of ceremonies. The queen of the tournament rides on a special float which is always the most elaborate one of the parade, being made from more than 250,000 flowers. Spectators and participants alike enjoy the pageantry associated with the occasion. Preparation for next year's Tournament of Roses begins on January 2.

In the warmer regions all around the country there are other games whose names are characteristic of

the state. People watch the Orange Bowl game in Florida, the Cotton Bowl in Texas, and the Sugar Bowl in Louisiana. In most cultures, people promise to better themselves in the following year. Americans have inherited the tradition and even write down their New Year's resolutions. Whatever the resolution, most of them are broken or forgotten by February!

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Dr. Martin Luther King Day

(Third Monday in January)

*"We will not resort to violence.
We will not degrade ourselves with hatred.
Love will not be returned with hate."*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It was December, 1955, and Martin Luther King, Jr. had just received his doctorate degree in theology. He had moved to Montgomery, Alabama to preach at a Baptist church. He saw there, as in many other southern states, that African-Americans had to ride in the back of public buses. Dr. King knew that this law violated the rights of every African-American. He organized and led a boycott of the public buses in the city of Montgomery. Any person, black or white, who was against segregation refused to use public transportation. Those people who boycotted were threatened or attacked by other people, or even arrested or jailed by the police. After 382 Days of boycotting the bus system, the Supreme Court declared that the Alabama state segregation law was unconstitutional.

African-Americans were not only segregated on buses throughout the south. Equal housing was denied to them, and seating in many hotels and restaurants was refused.

In 1957, Dr. King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and moved back to his home town of Atlanta, Georgia. This was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. In the years following, he continued to organize non-violent protests against unequal treatment of African-American people. His philosophy remained peaceful, and he constantly reminded his followers that their fight would be victorious if they did not resort to bloodshed. Nonetheless, he and his demonstrators were often threatened and attacked. Demonstrations which began peacefully often ended up in violence, and he and many others were often arrested.

On August 23, 1963, a crowd of more than 250,000 people gathered in Washington, D.C. and marched to the Capitol Building to support the passing of laws that guaranteed every American equal civil rights. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was at the front of the "March on Washington." On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that day, Dr. King delivered a speech that was later entitled "I Have a Dream." The March was one of the largest gatherings of black and white people that the nation's capital had ever seen... and no violence occurred.

One year later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. It was not the first law of civil rights for Americans, but it was the most thorough and effective. The act guaranteed equal rights in housing, public facilities, voting and public schools. Everyone would have impartial hearings and jury trials. A civil rights commission would ensure that these laws were enforced. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and thousands of others now knew that they had not struggled in vain. In the same year Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize for leading non-violent demonstrations.

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while he was leading a workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee. White people and black people who had worked so hard for peace and civil rights were shocked and angry. The world grieved the loss of this man of peace.

The following is an excerpt from the speech entitled "I Have a Dream," delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 23, 1963.

"I Have a Dream,"

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character...

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama ... will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvacious peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and mole hill of Mississippi.

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

The Making of a Holiday

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death did not slow the Civil Rights Movement. Black and white people continued to fight for freedom and equality. Coretta Scott King is the widow of the civil rights leader. In 1970, she established the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center in Atlanta, Georgia. This "living memorial" consists of his boyhood home and the Ebenezer Baptist Church, where King is buried.

On Monday, January 20, 1986, in cities and towns across the country people celebrated the first official Martin Luther King Day, the only federal holiday commemorating an African-American. A ceremony which took place at an old railroad depot in Atlanta Georgia was especially emotional. Hundreds had gathered to sing and to march. Many were the same people who, in 1965, had marched

for fifty miles between two cities in the state of Alabama to protest segregation and discrimination of black Americans.

All through the 1980's, controversy surrounded the idea of a Martin Luther King Day. Congressmen and citizens had petitioned the President to make January 15, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, a federal holiday. Others wanted to make the holiday on the day he died, while some people did not want to have any holiday at all.

January 15 had been observed as a public holiday for many years in 27 states and Washington, D.C. Finally, in 1986, President Ronald Reagan declared the third Monday in January a federal legal holiday commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday.

Schools, offices and federal agencies are closed for the holiday. On Monday there are quiet memorial services as well as elaborate ceremonies in honor of Dr. King. On the preceding Sunday, ministers of all religions give special sermons reminding everyone of Dr. King's lifelong work for peace. All weekend, popular radio stations play songs and speeches that tell the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Television channels broadcast special programs with filmed highlights of Dr. King's life and times.

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Abraham Lincoln's Birthday

(February 12)

Until 1971, both February 12 and February 22 were observed as federal public holidays to honor the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and [George Washington](#) (February 22).

In 1971 President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal public holiday, the [Presidents' Day](#), to be observed on the third Monday of February, honoring all past president of the United States of America.

Of all the presidents in the history of the United State, Abraham Lincoln is probably the one that Americans remember the best and with deepest affection. His childhood in the frontier of Indiana set the course for his character and motivation later in life. He brought a new honesty and integrity to the White House. He would always be remembered as "honest Abe." Most of all, he is associated with the final abolition of slavery. Lincoln became a virtual symbol of the American dream whereby an ordinary person from humble beginnings could reach the pinnacle of society as president of the country.

Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809, in Kentucky, and spent the first seven years of his life there. They were difficult years in which Thomas Lincoln, Abe's father tried to make a living as a carpenter and farmer. The Lincolns moved from farm to farm around Kentucky, until 1816, when the family left to settle in Indiana. The United States was still young, and the midwest was a wild, unsettled frontier. They stopped in the middle of a forest in Spencer County, Indiana. Neighbors were few and far away, and the family lived in a three-sided shelter until Abe's father cleared enough land and built a log cabin.

Abe and his sister helped with the heavy daily tasks that came with farming. He cleared the woods for farmland with his father, and became so skilled at splitting logs that neighbors settling into the Indiana territory paid him to split logs. At the time, he confessed that he did not really like manual labor. He wrote later that although he was very young, an axe was put into his hand, and he "was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument."

In his entire life, Abe was only able to go to school for a total of one year. This lack of education only made him hungry for more knowledge. His mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, influenced him in his quest for learning. Although she was completely uneducated and could not read or write, she encouraged her children to study by themselves. His beloved mother died when he was nine years old, The family was greatly saddened, and for a while lived almost in squalor. Two years later, however, Thomas Lincoln remarried. Abe's stepmother was also instrumental in encouraging him to read. He even travelled to neighboring farms and counties to borrow books. He was often found reading next to a pile of logs that he should have been splitting.

When he was older, Abe noticed that people loved to listen to stories. He began telling tall tales in the general store where he worked. Customers came and stayed when they knew he was there, just to hear him talk. The family moved once again, this time to Illinois. He began working in a store in the new capital of Springfield. His powers of speech soon helped him enter a new arena, that of politics and law. In 1834 he was elected into the House of Representatives and began studying to become a lawyer.

In 1839, he met his future wife Mary Todd. Coincidentally, she had been born in Kentucky, and her family had recently moved to Illinois. They had a long and unstable courtship, because Abe was indecisive about marrying. They finally exchanged their vows in Mary's home in November 1842. Abraham Lincoln began a long road to become the sixteenth president of the United States. He practiced law all across the state for the next few years, traveling far on horseback to different counties. In 1847 he was elected into Congress, but his opinions did not ensure him a long stay there. He was vehemently against slavery and took stands on other controversial issues. He was not elected for a second term, so he returned to his law practice.

A few years later, slavery became a stronger issue, and more people were willing to abolish it. Lincoln joined the

Republicans, a new political party that was opposed to slavery. The Republicans nominated him for the U.S. Senate in 1858, and in his acceptance speech, he stated:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand... This government cannot endure, permanently half-slave and half-free... I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall but I do expect it will cease to be divided. "

Abraham Lincoln's oratorical powers brought him to the attention of the nation. He challenged the Democratic nominee to the Senate to a series of debates. Using the simple language that he used to communicate with people all his life, he defeated Douglas in the debates but lost to him in the election.

Nominated by the Republican Party in 1860 as its candidate for the Presidency of the United States, Lincoln won by a small margin. But with his election, the country began the process of "dividing against itself." South Carolina had seceded from the Union before he was even inaugurated. Other states followed to form the Confederate States of America. The North and South were divided, and the Civil War began. The war was not only over the abolition of slavery, but also the rights of individual states to make their own choices on other issues.

The bloody Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania was the largest battle ever fought on American soil. On November 19, 1863, at a ceremony to establish Gettysburg as a national monument, Lincoln delivered what was to become one of the finest orations in American history, the Gettysburg Address. Yet just after he delivered it, there was polite applause, and reactions varied from indifference to disappointment. Edward Everett, ex-governor of Massachusetts, was the main speaker, and his speech had lasted for almost two hours. On his trip back to Washington, Lincoln himself said of his speech: "It was a flat failure. I am distressed about it. I ought to have prepared it with more care." But Edward Everett assured Lincoln saying: "I would be glad if I could flatter myself that I came near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

The Gettysburg Address

November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation may live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people by the people for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Lincoln was elected to a second term in 1864. The South surrendered, and the Civil War ended on April 9, 1865. The difficult task of national reconstruction and reconciliation lay ahead, but Lincoln would not be the person to lead the country through this difficult period.

On April 14, Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln attended a play at the Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. A few minutes past ten o'clock, an actor who disagreed with Lincoln's political opinions stepped into the Presidential box and shot the President. He died the following morning.

American poet Walt Whitman, along with the rest of the country, mourned the death of Abraham Lincoln. He wrote this poem in his honor.

Captain! my Captain!

*O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

*O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up--for you the flag is flung--for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths--for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck, You've fallen cold and dead.*

*My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread, Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

Quotations from Lincoln

"...As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy"

Letter, August 1858

"If we do not make common cause to save the good old ship of the Union on this voyage, nobody will have a chance to pilot her on another voyage. "

Speech, Cleveland, Ohio,

February 15, 1861

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Presidents Day

(Third Monday in February)

Until 1971, both February 12 and February 22 were observed as federal holidays to honor the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12) and George Washington (Feb. 22).

In 1971 President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal holiday, the *Presidents' Day*, to be observed on the third Monday of February, honoring all past presidents of the United States of America.

[Abraham Lincoln's Birthday](#) (February 12)

[George Washington's Birthday](#) (February 22)

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

George Washington's Birthday

(February 22)

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In 1971 President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal public holiday, the [Presidents' Day](#), to be observed on the third Monday of February, honoring all past presidents of the United States of America.

George Washington, born February 22, 1732 in Virginia, was a natural leader, instrumental in creating a united nation out of a conglomeration of struggling colonies and territories. The first president of the United States of America is affectionately honored as "the father of his country."

Shortly after his twenty-second birthday, Washington served in the army of King George III of England and was put in command of a troop of soldiers. The French were settling on British soil and turning the local Indians against the British colonists. Later, in the war against the French and Indians, Washington commanded large troops of soldiers and showed courage that inspired all his soldiers.

At this time, King George III of England dominated the thirteen colonies along the east coast and much of the surrounding territories. Colonists began to want their freedom, and live with a set of rules based on democracy, not under the rule of a faraway king. The Boston Tea Party of 1773, a colonial rebellion against taxes, helped to spark the American Revolution. Washington led and encouraged his inexperienced armies against the British forces for eight years until the colonies won their independence.

Laws for the new country were written into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The laws called for a President, and here again George Washington was considered the natural choice. He agreed to serve his country as the first President. George Washington moved from Mount Vernon, his family home south of Alexandria, Virginia, to New York City, then the capital of the United States. The trip took a week by horse and carriage. All along the way, people waited eagerly to glimpse the Revolutionary War general and their first President.

Washington was a reluctant leader. As he inspired his soldiers through two wars, he saw himself serving his country, not leading it. When he accepted two terms as president, he saw himself serving God and his country in peacetime. He turned down a third term as president, wishing only to retire to his beautiful family home, Mount Vernon.

Americans celebrated Washington's birthday while he was still alive. They were grateful for a strong leader who had proven that democracy was a feasible way to govern the growing country. And, while he was alive, legends grew up about him. The most famous one says that he was so strong, he threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River. Some Americans argue that this is a true story. Parts of the Potomac River, they say, were extremely narrow a few hundred years ago! Another story which has never been proven, but Americans pass down to their children as a lesson:

When George Washington was young, his father gave him a hatchet. He tried to cut down a cherry tree with it. His father noticed the cuts on the tree, and asked his son how they got there. "I cannot tell a lie," George said, "I did it with my hatchet." Perhaps George Washington had no hatchet, and perhaps there were no cherry trees where he grew up. However, George Washington today represents honesty, and cherry pies have become a favorite food associated with his birthday.

Various communities observe the holiday by staging pageants and reenactments of important milestones in Washington's life. Also, the holiday has taken on another side, much more commercial in nature. Many shopping malls and stores run Presidents' Day sales to attract shoppers who have the day off from work or school.

The White House

While in office, George Washington held a contest for the best architectural design of a "President's Palace." Among the competitors was Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and an architect.

His design was entered anonymously, signed only with the initials "A. Z." It didn't win. An Irish architect named James Hoban won \$500, a piece of land, and of course the honor of having his plans used in the final design.

Americans called it the "President's House" because the word "palace" reminded them of the monarchy that they recently broke away from. The official name was the "Executive Mansion" from 1818-1902. Today it is called simply "The White House." Some historians say that people began calling it the White House because it was painted white after being restored after it had been burned by the British in 1812. Another legend is that George Washington named it after his wife's house in the state of Virginia.

The first president never had the chance to stay there. Washington died on December 14, 1799, one year before the White House was completed during the Presidency of John Adams. In 1806, Thomas Jefferson had another chance at designing the White House when he moved in as third President. Much of the house and Jefferson's additions were destroyed in the War of 1812. When it was rebuilt, however, James Hoban supervised the work. The White House was redecorated in 1881 and again in 1902 by the current presidents, and each change reflected the style of the times. It was completely renovated in 1949 when Harry S. Truman was President.

In 1960 when John Kennedy became President, his wife Jacqueline redecorated the White House to display the beauty of American furnishings and art. The gardens outside were beautified and enlarged. Since then the presidents' wives have continued to maintain their home in a tasteful style.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Arbor Day

(Held for one day every April as close to April 22nd or on that day)

In the 1840s, the midwestern state of Nebraska was a territory within a wide prairie. When pioneers moved out to settle there, they found few trees to build houses or to burn for fuel. There was no shade from the sun or wind, and crops did not grow well in the dry earth.

J. Sterling Morton was one of those pioneers who moved to the treeless Nebraska territory. He and his wife planted trees immediately after moving from their home town of Detroit, Michigan. Morton was a journalist, and later the editor, for Nebraska's first newspaper. In his writings he advocated planting trees to help life on this vast barren plain.

He became the secretary of the Nebraska Territory. At a meeting of the State Board of Agriculture in January 1872, Morton proposed that citizens of the new state of Nebraska set aside April 10 as a day to plant trees. He suggested offering prizes as incentives for communities and organisation that planted the most trees properly. Everyone welcomed the idea enthusiastically. Nebraskans planted about one million trees on that first Arbor Day. Today a visitor to Nebraska would never guess that it was once a dusty prairie.

In 1882, Nebraska declared its own Arbor Day as a legal holiday and the date was changed to Morton's birthday, April 22. Today almost every state celebrates an Arbor day but because the best tree-planting season changes from region to region, some states observe the day on different dates. Hawaiians, for example, plant Arbor Day trees on the first Friday in November!

"Arbor Day which has already transplanted itself to every state in the American Union and has even been adopted in foreign lands... is not like other holidays. Each of those reposes on the past, while Arbor Day proposes for the future."

-J. Sterling Morton

Earth Day

On April 22, 1970, Arbor Day activities were modified to emphasize the critical importance of the environment and to make the American public aware of the destruction of the earth's natural preserves. This day, Earth Day, was observed by twenty million Americans, most of them students. The sponsors of Earth Day hoped to start an environmental movement that would alter industrial practices and human consumption.

Twenty years later in 1990, Earth Day was observed once again. On the Mall, in the center of Washington, D.C., people gathered for Earthfest. At this second observance of Earth Day, participants and planners were not only college students but ordinary Americans of all ages and from all walks of life. Musicians performed songs about nature. Celebrities spoke about what Americans can do to recycle. Federal agencies offered expositions showing their efforts in stopping wasteful practices polluting the environment. Conservation groups taught the crowds about rain forests, and how their destruction could mean the destruction of large parts of the world. Although Earth Day is not a yearly federal holiday it has helped Americans realize that they can and should do something to protect the environment.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Mother's Day

(Second Sunday in May)

On the second Sunday in May, American children of all ages treat their mothers to something special. It is the one day out of the year when children, young and old, try to show in a tangible way how much they appreciate their mothers.

England was one of the first countries to set aside a day to recognize mothers. In the eighteenth century when many people worked as household servants for the rich, "Mothering Sunday" was reserved for them to return home to be with their mothers. Though this custom stopped when the Industrial Revolution altered the working and living patterns of the people, one Sunday for Mothers was established as a holiday in the twentieth century.

In the United States, Mother's Day did not become an official holiday until 1915. Its establishment was due largely to the perseverance and love of one daughter, Anna Jarvis. Anna's mother had provided strength and support as the family made their home in West Virginia and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where her father served as a minister. As a girl, Anna had helped her mother take care of her garden, mostly filled with white carnations, her mother's favorite flower. When Mrs. Jarvis died on May 5, 1905, Anna was determined to honor her. She asked the minister at her church in West Virginia to give a sermon in her mother's memory. On the same Sunday in Philadelphia, their minister honored Mrs. Jarvis and all mothers with a special Mother's Day service. Anna Jarvis began writing to congressmen, asking them to set aside a day to honor mothers. In 1910, the governor of West Virginia proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day and a year later every state celebrated it.

On Mother's Day morning some American children follow the tradition of serving their mothers breakfast in bed. Other children will give their mothers gifts which they have made themselves or bought in stores. Adults give their mothers red carnations, the official Mother's Day flower. If their mothers are deceased they may bring white carnations to their grave sites. This is the busiest day of the year for American restaurants. On her special day, family members do not want Mom to cook dinner!

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Memorial Day

(Last Monday in May)

It was 1866 and the United States was recovering from the long and bloody Civil War between the North and the South. Surviving soldiers came home, some with missing limbs, and all with stories to tell. Henry Welles, a drugstore owner in Waterloo, New York, heard the stories and had an idea. He suggested that all the shops in town close for one day to honor the soldiers who were killed in the Civil War and were buried in the Waterloo cemetery. On the morning of May 5, the townspeople placed flowers, wreaths and crosses on the graves of the Northern soldiers in the cemetery. At about the same time, Retired Major General Jonathan A. Logan planned another ceremony, this time for the soldiers who survived the war. He led the veterans through town to the cemetery to decorate their comrades' graves with flags. It was not a happy celebration, but a memorial. The townspeople called it Decoration Day.

In Retired Major General Logan's proclamation of Memorial Day, he declared:

"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 and 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."

The two ceremonies were joined in 1868, and northern states commemorated the day on May 30. The southern states commemorated their war dead on different days. Children read poems and sang civil war songs and veterans came to school wearing their medals and uniforms to tell students about the Civil War. Then the veterans marched through their home towns followed by the townspeople to the cemetery. They decorated graves and took photographs of soldiers next to American flags. Rifles were shot in the air as a salute to the northern soldiers who had given their lives to keep the United States together.

In 1882, the name was changed to Memorial Day and soldiers who had died in previous wars were honored as well. In the northern United States, it was designated a public holiday. In 1971, along with other holidays, President Richard Nixon declared Memorial Day a federal holiday on the last Monday in May.

Cities all around the United States hold their own ceremonies on the last Monday in May* to pay respect to the men and women who have died in wars or in the service of their country.

Memorial Day is not limited to honor only those Americans from the armed forces. It is also a day for personal remembrance. Families and individuals honor the memories of their loved ones who have died. Church services, visits to the cemetery, flowers on graves or even silent tribute mark the day with dignity and solemnity. It is a day of reflection. However, to many Americans the day also signals the beginning of summer with a three-day weekend to spend at the beach, in the mountains or at home relaxing.

In Waterloo, New York, the origin has not been lost and in fact the meaning has become even more special. President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed Waterloo the birthplace of Memorial Day in 1966, 100 years after the first commemoration. Every May 30, townspeople still walk to the cemeteries and hold memorial services. They decorate the graves with flags and flowers. Then they walk back to the park in the middle of town. In the middle of the park, near a monument dedicated to soldiers, sailors and

marines, the Gettysburg address is read, followed by Retired Major General Logan's Order # 11 designating Decoration Day. The village choirs sing patriotic songs. In the evening, school children take part in a parade.

Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia is the nation's largest national cemetery. Not only are members of the armed forces buried here; astronauts, explorers and other distinguished Americans have all been honored with a special place here. President John F. Kennedy is buried in a spot overlooking Washington, D.C..

Here in the early hours of the Friday morning before Memorial Day, soldiers of the Third U.S. infantry walk along the rows of headstones. Each soldier stops at a headstone, reaches to a bundle of flags he is carrying, pulls one out and pushes it into the ground. These soldiers are part of a special regiment. the Old Guard. Most consider it a privilege to place flags on the more than two hundred thousand graves of soldiers who served in the wars or who died in them. "They have done their job," said one soldier, "and now it's my turn to do mine."

It is an equal honor to guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier all year. There are actually four soldiers buried in this spot: the unknown soldiers of the two World Wars, the Korean conflict, and the Vietnam War. Each soldier represents all of those who gave their lives in the modern wars. Soldiers from the Army's Third Infantry guard the tomb twenty-four hours a day. Wreath-laying ceremonies take place all through the year and people from all over the world come to watch the changing of the guard. On another hill of Arlington Cemetery there is a mass grave of unidentified soldiers from the Civil War.

On Memorial Day, the President or Vice President of the United States gives a speech and lays a wreath on the tombs. Members of the armed forces shoot a rifle salute in the air. Veterans and families come to lay their own wreaths and say prayers. There is a chance that one of the soldiers buried here is a father, son, brother or friend.

**Some southern states continue to celebrate Memorial Day on various days, i.e. June 3rd in Louisiana and Tennessee called "Confederate Memorial Day" and on May 10th in North and South Carolina.*

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Flag Day

(June 14)



National flags are not merely symbols of a country. Their colors and designs convey past history and future goals. Flags have powerful connotations. They speak to the people and politicians. People of one country will burn the flag of another with whose politics they do not agree. To show their anger, students display their own nation's flags with the design altered or cut out completely. Dictators fly flags; dissidents rip them down. In every country of the world, the treatment of a flag displays an opinion or statement.

Americans take the treatment of their flag seriously and in the 20th century this has become an important issue. Included in the code of ethics are such rules as the national flag cannot be used for advertising. It cannot cover a monument or any ceilings. It must not be folded while being displayed. No one should write on an American flag. Ships can lower their flags slightly in greeting each other, but otherwise should not be dipped for any other object or person.

In the late 1960s, American students wore small flags sewn to the back of their jeans, symbolically insulting the American government and protesting its involvement in the Vietnam War. They burned the American flag in front of the Capitol Building in Washington as a statement of protest. In the early 1990s, senators suggested an amendment to the Constitution that would make this treatment of the flag illegal. The proposition was opposed because many others felt that this change would be a violation of Americans' constitutional rights to express their opinions freely.

For all the controversy it is interesting to point out that the United States did not even have a standardized flag until 1912! Called the "Stars and Stripes," or "Old Glory," the flag is one of the most complicated in the world. No other flag needs 64 pieces of fabric to make. The current flag has 13 red and white alternating stripes (representing the original 13 states) and 50 stars (each star represents one of the states of the Union) on a blue background.

The American flag has also changed designs more than any other flag in the world. The first flag, called the Grand Union, was first flown at the headquarters of the Continent Army on January 1, 1776. Betsy Ross, a seamstress, is said to have contributed to this design. She had an upholstery business which made flags for navy ships in Pennsylvania. A legend still persists that she showed George Washington how to make a five-pointed star and suggested thirteen stars in a circle for the first flag. Her descendants claimed that she offered the design. Actually, she and George Washington never met! George Washington did design the Grand Union but an often-quoted remark attributed to him might not be true:

We take the stars from heaven, the red from our mother country, separate it by white in stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her...

On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress proposed that the United States have a national flag instead of the British Union Jack. The 13 stars of the flag represented the 13 new states. There were few public ceremonies honoring the Stars and Stripes until 1877, when on, June 14, it was flown from every government building in honor of the centennial of the adoption of a national flag. Schools had unfurled American flags over their doors or outside the buildings long before this; but in 1890, North Dakota and New Jersey made a law that required their schools to fly the flag daily. The first official Flag Day was observed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1893. New York also proclaimed June 14 as Flag Day 1897. Other states were slow to follow. Some people thought that the day was too close to Memorial Day and Independence Day.

In August 1949, President Harry S. Truman proclaimed June 14* as Flag Day. Since then the President proclaims the commemoration yearly, and encourages all Americans in the country to display the Stars and Stripes outside their homes and businesses. Individual states determine how they will observe the day. In Pennsylvania and American Samoa it is a public holiday. Usually the flag is flown from all public buildings, speeches are made in public places and ceremonies take place in towns or cities
**In American Samoa Flag Day is celebrated on April 17th.*

Elementary school children across the nation make The Pledge of Allegiance in front of the flag every weekday morning:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

During the War of 1812 between the British and Americans, lawyer Francis Scott Key was escorting a prisoner to freedom by ship when he saw an American flag surviving a battle in Baltimore Harbor. The flag inspired him to write the poem which provides the words for the national anthem. The actual flag now hangs in the Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.. Today the "Star-Spangled Banner" is sung at large public gatherings such as sports events. Many television stations play the anthem before the station closes down for the night.

The Star-Spangled Banner

The National Anthem

Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our Flag was still there.
Oh, say does that Star Spangled Banner yet wave,
O'er the land of the free, and home of the brave?

Moderately, with spirit

1, Oh, — say, can you see, by the dawn's ear - ly light, What so
 proud - ly we hail'd at the twi - light's last gleam - ing? Whose broad stripes and bright
 stars, thro' the per - il - ous fight, O'er the ram - parts we watch'd were so
 gal - lant - ly stream - ing? And the rock - ets' red glare, the bombs burst - ing in

air, Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.

Chorus
Oh, say, does that Star-Span-gled Ban-ner yet wave O'er the

land of the free and the home of the brave?

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Father's Day

(Third Sunday in June)

The United States is one of the few countries in the world that has an official day on which fathers are honored by their children. On the third Sunday in June, fathers all across the United States are given presents, treated to dinner or otherwise made to feel special. .

The origin of Father's Day is not clear. Some say that it began with a church service in West Virginia in 1908. Others say the first Father's Day ceremony was held in Vancouver, Washington.

The president of the Chicago branch of the Lions' Club, Harry Meek, is said to have celebrated the first Father's Day with his organization in 1915; and the day that they chose was the third Sunday in June, the closest date to Meek's own birthday!

Regardless of when the first true Father's Day occurred, the strongest promoter of the holiday was Mrs. Bruce John Dodd of Spokane, Washington. Mrs. Dodd felt that she had an outstanding father. He was a veteran of the Civil War. His wife had died young, and he had raised six children without their mother.

In 1909, Mrs. Dodd approached her own minister and others in Spokane about having a church service dedicated to fathers on June 5, her father's birthday. That date was too soon for her minister to prepare the service, so he spoke a few weeks later on June 19th. From then on, the state of Washington celebrated the third Sunday in June as Father's Day. Children made special desserts, or visited their fathers if they lived apart.

States and organizations began lobbying Congress to declare an annual Father's Day. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson approved of this idea, but it was not until 1924 when President Calvin Coolidge made it a national event to "establish more intimate relations between fathers and their children and to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations." Since then, fathers had been honored and recognized by their families throughout the country on the third Sunday in June.

When children can't visit their fathers or take them out to dinner, they send a greeting card. Traditionally, fathers prefer greeting cards that are not too sentimental. Most greeting cards are whimsical so fathers laugh when they open them. Some give heartfelt thanks for being there whenever the child needed Dad.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Independence Day

(July 4)

"Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. "

-words written on the Liberty Bell

By the middle of the 1700s, the 13 colonies that made up part of England's empire in the New World were finding it difficult to be ruled by a king 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. They were tired of the taxes imposed upon them. But independence was a gradual and painful process. The colonists could not forget that they were British citizens and that they owed allegiance to King George III.

A "tea party" and a Massacre" were two events that hurried destiny. Along with general unrest these events united the colonists. In 1767 a tea company in India, owned by England, was losing money. To save the company, England levied a tax on tea sold in the colonies in 1773. Partly as a joke, Samuel Adams and other Bostonians dressed up as Indians and dumped a cargo of the India Company Tea into the Massachusetts Bay. King George III did not think it was funny, nor did he lift the tax on tea. In the Boston harbor, British soldiers were jeered and stoned by colonists who thought the soldiers had been sent to watch them. The soldiers fired into the crowd and killed a few citizens. The colonists exaggerated the number killed and called it a massacre.

Virginia took the first step toward independence by voting to set up a committee to represent the colonies. This First Continental Congress met in September of 1774. They drew up a list of grievances against the crown which became the first draft of a document that would formally separate the colonies from England. George Washington took command of the Continental Army and began fighting the British in Massachusetts. For the next eight years, colonists fought fervently in the Revolutionary War.

In the meantime, a war of words was being waged in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress presented & debated a second draft of the list of grievances, and John Hancock, the president of the Second Continental Congress, was the first to sign. The document, called the Declaration of Independence, was treasonous against the crown and the fifty-six men who signed it were in danger of being executed.

Independence Day is celebrated on July 4 because that is the day when the Continental Congress adopted the final draft of the Declaration of Independence*. From July 8, 1776, until the next month, the document was read publicly and people celebrated whenever they heard it. The next year, in Philadelphia, bells rang and ships fired guns, candles and firecrackers were lighted. But the War of Independence dragged on until 1783, and in that year, Independence Day was made an official holiday. 1941 Congress declared 4th of July a federal holiday.

**Except for the U.S. Virgin Islands where celebrations are held a week prior to the climax on 4th of July.*

John Adams, a lawyer, the first Vice President and the Second President of the United States, was one of the members of the Second Continental Congress who signed the Declaration of Independence. He wrote to his wife, "I believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival... it ought to be celebrated by pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other..."

John Adams may have predicted the later Independence Day celebrations or perhaps he started

traditions with his words. Every July fourth, Americans have a holiday from work. Communities have day-long picnics with favorite foods like hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, baked beans and all the fixings. The afternoon activities would not be complete without lively music, a friendly baseball game, three-legged races and a pie-eating or watermelon-eating contests. Some cities have parades with people dressed as the original founding fathers who march in parades to the music of high school bands. At dusk, people in towns and cities gather to watch the fireworks display. Wherever Americans are around the globe, they will get together for a traditional 4th of July celebration!

The Declaration of Independence was first read in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Today, at the Freedom Festival at Independence Hall, costumed Americans re-enact historical scenes and read the Declaration of Independence for the crowd. In Flagstaff, Arizona, American Indians hold a three-day pow-wow around the Fourth of July, with a rodeo and dancing. In Lititz, Pennsylvania, hundreds of candles that were made during the year are lighted in the park at night and floated in the water while a "Queen of Candles" is chosen. The ship U.S.S. John F. Kennedy comes in full sail to Boston Harbor in Massachusetts on the Fourth of July, and the Boston Pops Orchestra plays a musical concert of patriotic songs as more than 150,000 people watch fireworks burst over the water.

The Fireworks Family

New Castle, Pennsylvania, is home to the Vitale Fireworks Display Company, responsible for more than one thousand fireworks shows every year. In 1922 Constantino Vitale brought his expertise at making fireworks from Italy to the United States. He passed his secrets on to his four sons, and since then the company has been making Americans exclaim "ooohhh" and "aaahhhh" at the lighted colors in the sky on July 4 and other occasions. "It's like putting on a ballet show except that the dancers were above, painting the sky," says Vitale's granddaughter. "Seeing that spectacular display in the sky made me really love the country."

The sight and sound of a ringing bell represents freedom to most Americans because of the Liberty Bell that rang in Philadelphia when the new country was born.

In 1752 the new bell arrived safely from England, but at the first blow from a hammer to test it, it cracked. Not wanting to delay by returning the bell to England, the officials ordered bell founders in Philadelphia to remedy the fault. Two times it was recast before it was finally ready.

On July 8, 1776, the bell rang to mark the occasion of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. On April 16, 1783 it proudly announced the proclamation of peace and the newly won independence of the United States of America.

At every event of national importance, the Liberty Bell joined its harmonious tones to the general acclaim: in 1789, the election of George Washington; in 1797, the election of John Adams; in 1799, the death of Washington; and in 1801, the election of Thomas Jefferson. On July 4, 1826, the bell was nearly three quarters of a century old, and the nation whose birth it had helped to announce was now a lusty youngster of 50. Joyous indeed was the bell's sound on that occasion. Then, on July 8, 1835, while tolling for the funeral procession of John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the great bell cracked.

Fearing that the crack would eventually destroy the historic bell, officials ordered it taken down from the tower. It was after this that the Liberty Bell received its name. Since then, the bell has been on display but has never rung. In fact, no one living knows the voice of the Liberty Bell, for it has never spoken since 1835. The crack which appeared on that occasion is prevented from widening by a mechanical device, called a spider, installed inside the bell.

A few years ago the bell foundry in London that originally cast the great bell made a friendly proposal - to ship the bell back to England, melt it, and recast it at no cost to the United States. The keepers of the bell considered the offer very seriously before giving an answer. Then they decided that the cracked liberty bell is a cherished symbol of America's struggle for freedom. Just as a man's facial lines and creases are a visible sign of the stress and strain he has survived, so the crack in the Liberty

Bell serves to remind Americans that their forefathers did not win liberty for their country and its people without strain and stress - and even extensive fractures. Therefore, on behalf of the American people, the officials thanked the London foundry for its generous offer, but refused, adding: "We like the bell as it is, crack and all. It is an important part of our heritage."

YANKEE DOODLE

Strangely, this patriotic song has derogatory origins. The music and words go back to 15th century Holland, as a harvesting song that began, "Yanker dudel doodle down." In England, the tune was used for a nursery rhyme, and later a song making fun of Puritan church leader Oliver Cromwell, because "Yankee" might be a mispronunciation of the word "English," and "doodle" refers to a dumb person. But it was a British surgeon, Richard Schuckburgh, who wrote the words which ridiculed the ragtag colonists fighting in the French and Indian War. Soon after, the British troops used the song to make fun of the colonists in the Revolutionary War. Yet it became the colonists' rallying anthem for that war.

AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL

Every so often a movement is started to make "America the Beautiful" the national anthem instead of "The Star-Spangled Banner," largely because it was not written as a result of a war. The tune is easier to sing and the whole country is praised, not only the flag. Katherine Lee Bates, an English professor at Wellesley College, rode in a horse-drawn wagon up Pike's Peak, a mountaintop-in Colorado in 1893. She saw a view of the mountains that few people saw in those days and was inspired by her glimpse the "spacious skies" and "purple mountains" to write a poem, which became the first verse of the song. The public loved the poem, and Miss Bates was encouraged to set it to music She chose the music of a hymn by Samuel Ward. The words and music travelled around the world, and today Mexico, Canada and Australia sing it with their own countries' names instead of "America."

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Labor Day

(First Monday in September)

Eleven-year-old Peter McGuire sold papers on the street in New York City. He shined shoes and cleaned stores and later ran errands. It was 1863 and his father, a poor Irish immigrant, had just enlisted to fight in the Civil War. Peter had to help support his mother and six brothers and sisters.

Many immigrants settled in New York City in the nineteenth century. They found that living conditions were not as wonderful as they had dreamed. Often there were six families crowded into a house made for one family. Thousands of children had to go to work. Working conditions were even worse. Immigrant men, women and children worked in factories for ten to twelve hours a day, stopping only for a short time to eat. They came to work even if they were tired or sick because if they didn't, they might be fired. Thousands of people were waiting to take their places.

When Peter was 17, he began an apprenticeship in a piano shop. This job was better than his others, for he was learning a trade, but he still worked long hours with low pay. At night he went to meetings and classes in economics and social issues of the day. One of the main issues of concern pertained to labor conditions. Workers were tired of long hours, low pay and uncertain jobs. They spoke of organizing themselves into a union of laborers to improve their working conditions. In the spring of 1872, Peter McGuire and 100,000 workers went on strike and marched through the streets, demanding a decrease in the long working day.

This event convinced Peter that an organized labor movement was important for the future of workers' rights. He spent the next year speaking to crowds of workers and unemployed people, lobbying the city government for jobs and relief money. It was not an easy road for Peter McGuire. He became known as a "disturber of the public peace." The city government ignored his demands. Peter himself could not find a job in his trade. He began to travel up and down the east coast to speak to laborers about unionizing. In 1881, he moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and began to organize carpenters there. He organized a convention of carpenters in Chicago, and it was there that a national union of carpenters was founded. He became General Secretary of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America.

The idea of organizing workers according to their trades spread around the country. Factory workers, dock workers and toolmakers all began to demand and get their rights to an eight-hour workday, a secure job and a future in their trades. Peter McGuire and laborers in other cities planned a holiday for workers on the first Monday in September, halfway between Independence Day and Thanksgiving Day.

On September 5, 1882 the first Labor Day parade was held in New York City. Twenty thousand workers marched in a parade up Broadway. They carried banners that read "LABOR CREATES ALL WEALTH," and "EIGHT HOURS FOR WORK, EIGHT HOURS FOR REST, EIGHT HOURS FOR RECREATION!" After the parade there were picnics all around the city. Workers and celebrants ate Irish stew, homemade bread and apple pie. At night, fireworks were set off. Within the next few years, the idea spread from coast to coast, and all states celebrated Labor Day. In 1894, Congress voted it a federal holiday.

Today we celebrate Labor Day with a little less fanfare on the first Monday of September. Some cities have parades and community picnics. Many politicians "kick off" their political campaigns by holding rallies on the holiday. Most Americans consider Labor Day the end of the summer, and the beaches and other popular resort areas are packed with people enjoying one last three-day weekend.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Columbus Day

(Second Monday in October)

Today we take for granted that the world is round. In the fifteenth century, however, most people believed the world was flat. They thought that monsters or a trip over the edge of the earth waited for anybody who sailed outside the limits of known territory. People laughed at or jailed others who dared think that the world was in the shape of a globe.

There were educated persons, however, who reasoned that the world must be round. An Italian named Christopher Columbus was bold enough to push this notion, and ask for money to explore the seas, and find what he thought would be the other hemisphere of the earth. Portugal, Italy and England refused to support such a venture.

At that time, spice merchants were looking for an easier route to Asia. They travelled south past Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, and continued eastward. Christopher Columbus convinced Queen Isabella of Spain that it would be easier to sail directly west and find the rich treasures of India and Asia. A new route would be found, he said, and possible new lands for Spain.

Columbus first asked Queen Isabella for help in 1486, but it was years before she agreed... provided that he conquer some of the islands and mainland for Spain. Columbus would also be given the title of "Admiral of All the Ocean Seas," and receive one-tenth of the riches that came from any of his discoveries.

Finally, on August 3, 1492, he and ninety men set sail on the flagship Santa Maria. Two other ships, the Nina and the Pinta, came with him. They sailed west. Three long months went by. His men became tired and sick, and threatened to turn the ships back. Columbus encouraged them, certain that they would find the spice trail to the East. On October 11th, ten o'clock at night, Columbus saw a light. The Pinta kept sailing, and reported that the light was, in fact, land. The next morning at dawn they landed.

Christopher Columbus and his crew had expected to see people native to India, or be taken to see the great leader Khan. They called the first people they saw "Indians." They had gone ashore in their best clothes, knelt and praised God for arriving safely. From the "Indians" they learned that the island was called Guanahani. Columbus christened it San Salvador and claimed it immediately for Spain. When they landed on the island that is now Cuba, they thought they were in Japan. After three subsequent voyages, Columbus was still unenlightened. He died a rich and famous man, but he never knew that he discovered lands that few people had imagined were there.

Columbus had stopped at what are now the Caribbean Islands, either Watling Island, Grand Turk Island, or Samana Cay. In 1926, Watling Island was renamed San Salvador and acknowledged as the first land in the New World. Recently, however, some people have begun to dispute the claim. Three men from Miami, Florida have started a movement to recognize Conception Island as the one that Columbus and his men first sighted and landed on. The controversy has not yet been resolve.

Few celebrations marked the discovery until hundreds of years later. The continent was not even named after Columbus, but an Italian explorer named Amerigo Vespucci. In 1792, a ceremony was held in New York honoring Columbus, and a monument was dedicated to him. Soon after that, the city of Washington was officially named the District of Columbia and became the capital of the United States. In 1892, a statue of Columbus was raised at the beginning of Columbus Avenue in New York City. At the Columbian Exposition held in Chicago that year, replicas of Columbus's three ships were displayed.

Americans might not have a Columbus Day if Christopher Columbus had not been born in Italy. Out

of pride for their native son, the Italian population of New York City organised the first celebration of the discovery of America on October 12, 1866. The next year, more Italian organisations in other cities held banquets, parades and dances on that date. In 1869, when Italians of San Francisco celebrated October 12, they called it Columbus Day.

In 1905, Colorado became the first state to observe a Columbus Day. Over the next few decades other states followed. In 1937, then- President Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed every October 12 as Columbus Day. Since 1971, it has been celebrated on the second Monday in October.

Although it is generally accepted that Christopher Columbus was the first European to have discovered the New World of the Americas, there is still some controversy over this claim. Some researchers and proponents of other explorers attribute the first sightings to the early Scandinavian Vikings or the voyages of Irish missionaries which predate the Columbus visit in 1492. The controversy may never be fully resolved to everyone's satisfaction, but 1992 marked the 500th anniversary of the Columbus discovery.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Veterans' Day

(Second Monday in November)

In 1918, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day in the eleventh month, the world rejoiced and celebrated. After four years of bitter war, an armistice was signed. The "war to end all wars" was over.

November 11, 1919 was set aside as Armistice Day in the United States, to remember the sacrifices that men and women made during World War I in order to ensure a lasting peace. On Armistice Day, soldiers who survived the war marched in a parade through their home towns. Politicians and veteran officers gave speeches and held ceremonies of thanks for the peace they had won.

Congress voted Armistice Day a federal holiday in 1938, 20 years after the war ended. But Americans realized that the previous war would not be the last one. World War II began the following year and nations great and small again participated in a bloody struggle. After the Second World War, Armistice Day continued to be observed on November 11.

In 1953 townspeople in Emporia, Kansas called the holiday Veterans' Day in gratitude to the veterans in their town. Soon after, Congress passed a bill introduced by a Kansas congressman renaming the federal holiday to Veterans' Day. 1971 President Nixon declared it a federal holiday on the second Monday in November.

Americans still give thanks for peace on Veterans' Day. There are ceremonies and speeches and at 11:00 in the morning, most Americans observe a moment of silence, remembering those who fought for peace.

After the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, the emphasis on holiday activities has shifted. There are fewer military parades and ceremonies. Veterans gather at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. to place gifts and stand quiet vigil at the names of their friends and relatives who fell in the Vietnam War. Families who have lost sons and daughters in wars turn their thoughts more toward peace and the avoidance of future wars.

Veterans of military service have organized support groups such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. On Veterans' Day and Memorial Day, these groups raise funds for their charitable activities by selling paper poppies made by disabled veterans. This bright red wildflower became a symbol of World War I after a bloody battle in a field of poppies called Flanders Field in Belgium.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Thanksgiving Day

(Fourth Thursday in November)

Almost every culture in the world has held celebrations of thanks for a plentiful harvest. The American Thanksgiving holiday began as a feast of thanksgiving in the early days of the American colonies almost four hundred years ago.

In 1620, a boat filled with more than one hundred people sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the New World. This religious group had begun to question the beliefs of the Church of England and they wanted to separate from it. The Pilgrims settled in what is now the state of Massachusetts. Their first winter in the New World was difficult. They had arrived too late to grow many crops, and without fresh food, half the colony died from disease. The following spring the Iroquois Indians taught them how to grow corn (maize), a new food for the colonists. They showed them other crops to grow in the unfamiliar soil and how to hunt and fish.

In the autumn of 1621, bountiful crops of corn, barley, beans and pumpkins were harvested. The colonists had much to be thankful for, so a feast was planned. They invited the local Indian chief and 90 Indians. The Indians brought deer to roast with the turkeys and other wild game offered by the colonists. The colonists had learned how to cook cranberries and different kinds of corn and squash dishes from the Indians. To this first Thanksgiving, the Indians had even brought popcorn.

In following years, many of the original colonists celebrated the autumn harvest with a feast of thanks. After the United States became an independent country, Congress recommended one yearly day of thanksgiving for the whole nation to celebrate. George Washington suggested the date November 26 as Thanksgiving Day. Then in 1863, at the end of a long and bloody civil war, Abraham Lincoln asked all Americans to set aside the last Thursday in November as a day of thanksgiving*.

The President's Yearly Proclamation

Thanksgiving falls on the fourth Thursday of November, a different date every year. The President must proclaim that date as the official celebration. Here is an excerpt from President George Bush's Thanksgiving proclamation of 1990:

"The historic observance of a day of thanksgiving at Plymouth, in 1621, was one of many occasions on which our ancestors paused to acknowledge their dependence on the mercy and favor of Divine Providence. Today, on this Thanksgiving Day, likewise observed during a season of celebration and harvest, we have added cause for rejoicing: the seeds of democratic thought sown on these shores continue to take root around the world...

"The great freedom and prosperity with which we have been blessed is cause for rejoicing - and it is equally a responsibility... Our "errand in the wilderness," begun more than 350 years ago, is not yet complete. Abroad, we are working toward a new partnership of nations. At home, we seek lasting solutions to the problems facing our nation and pray for a society "with liberty and justice for all," the alleviation of want, and the restoration of hope to all our people....

"Now, therefore, I, George Bush, president of the United States of America, do hereby call upon the American people to observe Thursday, November 22, 1990, as a National Day of Thanksgiving and to gather together in homes and places of worship on that day of thanks to affirm by their prayers and their

gratitude the many blessings God has bestowed upon us."

Thanksgiving is a time for tradition and sharing. Even if they live far away, family members gather for a reunion at the house of an older relative. All give thanks together for the good things that they have. In this spirit of sharing, civic groups and charitable organizations offer a traditional meal to those in need, particularly the homeless. On most tables throughout the United States, foods eaten at the first thanksgiving have become traditional.

**1939 President Franklin D. Roosevelt set it one week earlier. He wanted to help business by lengthening the shopping period before christmas. Congress ruled that after 1941 the 4th Thursday in November would be a federal holiday proclaimed by the President each year.*

Symbols of Thanksgiving

Turkey, corn (or maize), pumpkins and cranberry sauce are symbols which represent the first Thanksgiving. Now all of these symbols are drawn on holiday decorations and greeting cards.

The use of corn meant the survival of the colonies. "Indian corn" as a table or door decoration represents the harvest and the fall season.

Sweet-sour cranberry sauce, or cranberry jelly, was on the first Thanksgiving table and is still served today. The cranberry is a small, sour berry. It grows in bogs, or muddy areas, in Massachusetts and other New England states. The Indians used the fruit to treat infections. They used the juice to dye their rugs and blankets. They taught the colonists how to cook the berries with sweetener and water to make a sauce. The Indians called it "ibimi" which means "bitter berry." When the colonists saw it, they named it "crane-berry" because the flowers of the berry bent the stalk over, and it resembled the long-necked bird called a crane. The berries are still grown in New England. Very few people know, however, that before the berries are put in bags to be sent to the rest of the country, each individual berry must bounce at least four inches high to make sure they are not too ripe!

In 1988, a Thanksgiving ceremony of a different kind took place at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. More than four thousand people gathered on Thanksgiving night. Among them were Native Americans representing tribes from all over the country and descendants of people whose ancestors had migrated to the New World.

The ceremony was a public acknowledgment of the Indians' role in the first Thanksgiving 350 years ago. Until recently most schoolchildren believed that the Pilgrims cooked the entire Thanksgiving feast, and offered it to the Indians. In fact, the feast was planned to thank the Indians for teaching them how to cook those foods. Without the Indians, the first settlers would not have survived.

"We celebrate Thanksgiving along with the rest of America, maybe in different ways and for different reasons. Despite everything that's happened to us since we fed the Pilgrims, we still have our language, our culture, our distinct social system. Even in a nuclear age, we still have a tribal people."

-Wilma Mankiller, principal chief of the Cherokee nation

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Christmas Day

(December 25)

Christmas is a joyful religious holiday when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The Christmas story comes from the Bible. An angel appeared to shepherds and told them that a Savior had been born to Mary and Joseph in a stable in Bethlehem. Three Wise Men from the East (the Magi) followed a wondrous star which led them to the baby Jesus to whom they paid homage and presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

To people all over the world, Christmas is a season of giving and receiving presents. In some European countries, Father Christmas, or Saint Nicholas, comes into houses in the night and leaves gifts for the children. Saint Nicholas is represented as a kindly man with a red cloak and long white beard. Another character, the Norse God Odin, rode on a magical flying horse across the sky in the winter to reward people with gifts. These different legends passed across the ages to make the presentday Santa Claus.

Immigrant settlers brought Father Christmas to the United States. Father Christmas' name was gradually changed to Santa Claus, from the Dutch name for Father Christmas, which is Sinter Claas. Although he has origins in Norse and pre-Christian mythology, Santa Claus took shape in the United States. Americans gave Santa Claus a white beard, dressed him in a red suit and made him a cheery old gentleman with red cheeks and a twinkle in his eye.

Most children believe that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole. All year he lists the names of children, both those who have been good and those who have been bad. He decides what presents to give to the good children. He oversees the manufacturing and wrapping of the presents by his helpers.

Santa Claus supposedly gets his list of toys from the millions of children who write to him at the North Pole. Children also find Santa Claus at shopping malls across the country. They sit on his lap and tell him what they want for Christmas. Of course, their parents are probably nearby listening in as well.

On December 24, Christmas Eve, Santa hitches his eight reindeer to a sleigh and loads it with presents. The reindeer pull him and his sleigh through the sky to deliver presents to children all around the world, that is, if they had been good all year.

Several American towns maintain the spirit of Santa Claus. The New England state of Connecticut has a Christmas village where "Santa" and his elves give out gifts. In New York, a small town called the North Pole was designed for Santa Claus. There is a post office, a church and a blacksmith shop, to repair the shoes of the reindeer.

Santa Claus exists only in our imaginations. But he, Saint Nicholas, and Father Christmas are spirits of giving. Christmas has been associated with gift giving since the Wise Men brought gifts to welcome the newborn Jesus Christ.

In anticipation of Santa's visit, American children listen to their parents read "The Night Before Christmas" before they go to bed on Christmas Eve. Clement Moore wrote the poem in 1823.

Christmas Cards

Another important custom of Christmas is to send and receive Christmas cards, which are meant to help express the sentiment of the season. Some are religious in nature; others are more secular. Americans begin sending Christmas cards early in December to friends, acquaintances, and

co-workers. The post office advises customers to mail early in the season and avoid the Christmas rush. Some people heed the advice; others wait until the last minute and then are upset when their loved ones have not received the greeting card or the present which they sent.

It seems that nearly every family has its own unique Christmas observances. Many people are especially proud of Christmas traditions brought to the United States from their countries of origin. The wonderful diversity of foods, music and songs, prayers and stories all make Christmas the holiday of holidays in the United States.

One custom in Texas and other parts of the American Southwest warmly welcomes Christmas visitors. People cut designs out of the sides of paper bags. Then they put enough sand in the bottom of the bag to hold a candle. They line their walkways with the bags, and light the candles after dark. Guests can easily find their friend's walkway and follow the candles up to the door.

In San Antonio, these "luminaries" are placed all along the River Walk, a paved walkway alongside the San Antonio River, and an old custom called "Las Posadas" is acted out.

"Las Posadas" represents the journey that Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Jerusalem on a winter night 2000 years ago. Mary was about to give birth to Jesus on their way to be counted in the census. The inns were full and the only place they could find to rest was a barn. Jesus was born there and was placed in a manger, or wooden bin for feeding animals.

Two young people are chosen to play the roles of Mary and Joseph. They follow the luminaries up to a house and knock on the door. Joseph asks the owner if they can stay there for the night. The owner refuses to let them in, because the house is full. They knock at several more houses until finally someone lets them come in to stay the night. The house where the couple is invited was chosen before the celebration, and has a doll in a manger, representing Jesus. When the couple arrives at the house, they and the people who have followed sing Christmas carols and eat the food provided by the "innkeeper."

Home for the Holidays

Going home for Christmas is a most cherished tradition of the holiday season. No matter where you may be the rest of the year, being at "home" with your family and friends for Christmas is "a must." The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are the busiest times of the year at airports, train stations and bus depots. It seems that all America is on the move and Americans are on their way to spend the holidays with their loved ones.

This means that the house will be full of cousins, aunts and uncles that might not see each other during the year. Everyone joins in to help in the preparation of the festivities. Some family members go to choose a Christmas tree to buy and bring home. Others decorate the house or wrap presents. And of course, each household needs to make lots of food!

On Christmas Eve, there are evening church services. Attention is focused on the nativity scene, while all join in singing carols. On Christmas Day, there are other religious ceremonies at churches which families attend before they make their rounds to visit friends and relatives.

The Christmas table looks much like a Thanksgiving feast of turkey or ham, potatoes and pie. No Christmas is complete without lots of desserts, and nothing symbolizes Christmas more than baked breads and cookies hot from the oven. Many American traditional desserts, like other Christmas customs, were started long ago in other parts of the world. Guests bring English fruit cake or plum pudding as presents to their hosts. "Crostoli," a fried bread spiced with orange peel, is made in Italian-American communities. As an ending for the Christmas banquet, Americans of German background eat "Pfeffernuesse," a bread full of sweet spices. Doughnuts are a holiday offering in many Ukrainian-American homes. Norwegian "Berlinerkranser" is a wreath-shaped cookie, dozens are

made, but few are left by Christmas morning! Candy doesn't remain for long, either, during the holiday weeks. Hard candies such as peppermint candy canes and curly green and red ribbon candy are traditional gifts and goodies.

At Christmas Eve gatherings adults drink eggnog, a drink made of cream, milk, sugar, beaten eggs and brandy or rum. Plenty of eggnog or hot cocoa is on hand in colder climates for carolers, or people who go from house to house to sing Christmas carols to their neighbors.

Long ago, each child hung a stocking, or sock, over the fireplace. Santa entered down the chimney and left candy and presents inside the socks for the children. Today the tradition is carried on, but the socks are now large red sock-shaped fabric bags still called stockings. Each child can't wait to open his or her eyes to see what Santa has left in the stocking.

Giving gifts is a Christmas tradition. However, in recent years, more and more people have complained that Christmas is too commercialized especially in large cities. Store owners begin advertising and decorating very early in hopes of selling more goods. Children demand more and more from Santa Claus because manufacturers and retailers saturate television with advertising. Some people believe that the origin of Christmas has been lost. Commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ is the very reason for Christmas and should be central to the celebration.

Every year human interest newspaper articles remind readers of the origin of Christmas. Shelters for the homeless and hungry appeal through the newspaper to send money or gifts to those who are less fortunate. Members of organization such as the Salvation Army dress up as Santa Claus and stand on the sidewalks outside stores to collect money for their own soup kitchens. City police forces supervise a "Toys for Tots" donation, in which people contribute new or used toys for children in hospitals and orphanages. Employees give a small part of their paychecks as a donation to a favorite charity. Such groups and organizations try to emphasize the true message of Christmas— to share what you have with others.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Easter

(A Sunday between March 22 and April 25)

The meaning of many different customs observed during Easter Sunday have been buried with time. Their origins lie in pre-Christian religions and Christianity. All in some way or another are a "salute to spring," marking re-birth. The white Easter lily has come to capture the glory of the holiday. The word "Easter" is named after Eastre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring. A festival was held in her honor every year at the vernal equinox.

People celebrate the holiday according to their beliefs and their religious denominations. Christians commemorate Good Friday as the day that Jesus Christ died and Easter Sunday as the day that He was resurrected. Protestant settlers brought the custom of a sunrise service, a religious gathering at dawn, to the United States.

Today on Easter Sunday children wake up to find that the Easter Bunny has left them baskets of candy. He has also hidden the eggs that they decorated earlier that week. Children hunt for the eggs all around the house. Neighborhoods and organizations hold Easter egg hunts, and the child who finds the most eggs wins a prize.

The Easter Bunny is a rabbit-spirit. Long ago, he was called the "Easter Hare." Hares and rabbits have frequent multiple births so they became a symbol of fertility. The custom of an Easter egg hunt began because children believed that hares laid eggs in the grass. The Romans believed that "All life comes from an egg." Christians consider eggs to be "the seed of life" and so they are symbolic of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Why we dye, or color, and decorate eggs is not certain. In ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome and Persia eggs were dyed for spring festivals. In medieval Europe, beautifully decorated eggs were given as gifts.

Egg Rolling

In England, Germany and some other countries, children rolled eggs down hills on Easter morning, a game which has been connected to the rolling away of the rock from Jesus Christ's tomb when he was resurrected. British settlers brought this custom to the New World.

In the United States in the early nineteenth century, Dolly Madison, the wife of the fourth American President, organized an egg roll in Washington, D.C. She had been told that Egyptian children used to roll eggs against the pyramids so she invited the children of Washington to roll hard-boiled eggs down the hilly lawn of the new Capitol building! The custom continued, except for the years during the Civil War. In 1880, the First Lady invited children to the White House for the Egg Roll because officials had complained that they were ruining the Capitol lawn. It has been held there ever since then, only canceled during times of war. The event has grown, and today Easter Monday is the only day of the year when tourists are allowed to wander over the White House lawn. The wife of the President sponsors it for the children of the entire country. The egg rolling event is open to children twelve years old and under. Adults are allowed only when accompanied by children!

Traditionally, many celebrants bought new clothes for Easter which they wore to church. After church services, everyone went for a walk around the town. This led to the American custom of Easter parades all over the country. Perhaps the most famous is along Fifth Avenue in New York City.

Good Friday is a federal holiday in 16 states and many schools and businesses throughout the U.S. are closed on this Friday.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

St. Valentine's Day

(February 14)

St. Valentine's Day has roots in several different legends that have found their way to us through the ages. One of the earliest popular symbols of the day is Cupid, the Roman god of love, who is represented by the image of a young boy with bow and arrow.

Three hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ, the Roman emperors still demanded that everyone believe in the Roman gods. Valentine, a Christian priest, had been thrown in prison for his teachings. On February 14, Valentine was beheaded, not only because he was a Christian, but also because he had performed a miracle. He supposedly cured the jailer's daughter of her blindness. The night before he was executed, he wrote the jailer's daughter a farewell letter, signing it "From Your Valentine." Another legend tells us that this same Valentine, well-loved by all, received notes to his jail cell from children and friends who missed him.

Another Valentine was an Italian bishop who lived at about the same time, AD 200. He was imprisoned because he secretly married couples, contrary to the laws of the Roman emperor. Some legends say he was burned at the stake.

February 14 was also a Roman holiday, held in honor of a goddess. Young men randomly chose the name of a young girl to escort to the festivities. The custom of choosing a sweetheart on this date spread through Europe in the Middle Ages, and then to the early American colonies. Throughout the ages, people also believed that birds picked their mates on February 14!

In AD 496 Saint Pope Gelasius I named February 14 as "Valentine's Day". Although it's not an official holiday, most Americans observe this day.

Whatever the odd mixture of origins, St. Valentine's Day is now a day for sweethearts. It is the day that you show your friend or loved one that you care. You can send candy to someone you think is special. Or you can send roses, the flower of love. Most people send "valentines," a greeting card named after the notes that St. Valentine received in jail. Valentines can be sentimental, romantic and heartfelt. They can be funny and friendly. If the sender is shy, valentines can be anonymous.

Americans of all ages love to send and receive valentines. Handmade valentines created by cutting hearts out of colored paper, show that a lot of thought was put into making them personal. Valentines can be heart-shaped, or have hearts, the symbol of love, on them. In elementary schools children make valentines for their classmates and put them in a large decorated box, similar to a mailbox. On February 14, the teacher opens the box and distributes the valentines to each student. After the students read their valentines they have a small party with refreshments.

For teenagers and adults, major newspapers throughout the country have a Valentine's Day offer. Anyone can send in a message, for a small fee of course, destined for a would-be sweetheart, a good friend, an acquaintance or even a spouse of fifty years. The message is printed in a special section of the newspaper on February 14.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

April Fool's Day

(April 1)

In sixteenth-century France, the start of the new year was observed on April first. It was celebrated in much the same way as it is today with parties and dancing into the late hours of the night. Then in 1562, Pope Gregory introduced a new calendar for the Christian world, and the new year fell on January first. There were some people, however, who hadn't heard or didn't believe the change in the date, so they continued to celebrate New Year's Day on April first. Others played tricks on them and called them "April fools." They sent them on a "fool's errand" or tried to make them believe that something false was true. In France today, April first is called "Poisson d'Avril." French children fool their friends by taping a paper fish to their friends' backs. When the "young fool" discovers this trick, the prankster yells "Poisson d'Avril!" (April Fish!)

Today Americans play small tricks on friends and strangers alike on the first of April. One common trick on April Fool's Day, or All Fool's Day, is pointing down to a friend's shoe and saying, "Your shoelace is untied." Teachers in the nineteenth century used to say to pupils, "Look! A flock of geese!" and point up. School children might tell a classmate that school has been canceled. Whatever the trick, if the innocent victim falls for the joke the prankster yells, "April Fool! "

The "fools' errands" we play on people are practical jokes. Putting salt in the sugar bowl for the next person is not a nice trick to play on a stranger. College students set their clocks an hour behind, so their roommates show up to the wrong class - or not at all. Some practical jokes are kept up the whole day before the victim realizes what day it is. Most April Fool jokes are in good fun and not meant to harm anyone. The most clever April Fool joke is the one where everyone laughs, especially the person upon whom the joke is played.

"The first of April is the day we remember what we are the other 364 days of the year. "

- American humorist Mark Twain

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Halloween

(October 31)

On October 31st, dozens of children dressed in costumes knock on their neighbors' doors and yell, "Trick or Treat" when the door opens. Pirates and princesses, ghosts and popular heroes of the day all hold bags open to catch the candy or other goodies that the neighbors drop in. As they give each child a treat the neighbors exclaim over the costumes and try to guess who is under the masks.

Since the 800's November 1st is a religious holiday known as All Saints' Day. The Mass that was said on this day was called Allhallowmas. The evening before became known as All Hakkiv e'en, or Halloween. Like some other American celebrations, its origins lie in both pre-Christian and Christian customs.

October 31 st was the eve of the Celtic new year. The Celts were the ancestors of the present-day Irish, Welsh and Scottish people. On this day ghosts walked and mingled with the living, or so the Celts thought. The townspeople baked food all that day and when night fell they dressed up and tried to resemble the souls of the dead. Hoping that the ghosts would leave peacefully before midnight of the new year the people carried the food to the edge of town and left it for them.

Much later, when Christianity spread throughout Ireland and October 31 was no longer the last day of the year, Halloween became a celebration mostly for children. "Ghosts" went from door to door asking for treats, or else a trick would be played on the owners of the house. When millions of Irish people immigrated to the United States in the 1840s the tradition came with them.

Today' school dances and neighborhood parties called "block parties" are popular among young and old alike. More and more adults celebrate Halloween. They dress up like historical or political figures and go to masquerade parties. In larger cities, costumed children and their parents gather at shopping malls early in the evening. Stores and businesses give parties with games and treats for the children. Teenagers enjoy costume dances at their schools and the more outrageous the costume the better!

Certain pranks such as soaping car windows and tipping over garbage cans are expected.. But partying and pranks are not the only things that Halloweeners enjoy doing. Some collect money to buy food and medicine for needy children around the world.

At Halloween parties children play traditional games. One of the most popular is called pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey: One child is blindfolded and spun slowly so that he or she will become dizzy. Then the child must find a paper donkey hanging on the wall and try to pin a tail onto the back. Another game is bobbing for apples. One child at a time has to get apples from a tub of water without using hands! How? By sinking his or her face into the water and biting the apple!

Symbols of Halloween

Halloween originated as a celebration connected with evil spirits. Witches flying on broomsticks with black cats, ghosts, goblins and skeletons have all evolved as symbols of Halloween. They are popular trick-or-treat costumes and decorations for greeting cards and windows. Black is one of the traditional Halloween colors, probably because Halloween festivals and traditions took place at night. In the weeks before October 31, Americans decorate windows of houses and schools with silhouettes of witches and black cats.

Pumpkins are also a symbol of Halloween. The pumpkin is an orange-colored squash, and orange has become the other traditional Halloween color. Carving pumpkins into jack- o'lanterns is a Halloween

custom also dating back to Ireland. A legend grew up about a man named Jack who was so stingy that he was not allowed into heaven when he died, because he was a miser. He couldn't enter hell either because he had played jokes on the devil. As a result, Jack had to walk the earth with his lantern until Judgement Day. The Irish people carved scary faces out of turnips, beets or potatoes representing "Jack of the Lantern," or Jack-o'-lantern. When the Irish brought their customs to the United States, they carved faces on pumpkins because in the autumn they were more plentiful than turnips. Today jack-o'-lanterns in the windows of a house on Halloween night let costumed children know that there are goodies waiting if they knock and say "Trick or Treat!"

Halloween Treats

Dried Pumpkin Seeds

After carving your pumpkin, separate the pulp from the seeds. Rinse the seeds and spread them out to dry. The next day, add enough melted butter or margarine to coat each seed. Spread the seeds onto a cookie sheet and bake for 20 minutes in a 300 degree oven for 20 minutes or until they are slightly brown.

Caramel Apples

Take the paper wrapping off about 100 caramels and put them in a saucepan. Put the saucepan over a pan of boiling water. Boil the water until the caramels melt. Put a wooden stick into the top of each apple, dip the apple into the caramel. Let them cool on wax paper and enjoy!

Popcorn Balls

Combine 1/2 cup of corn syrup, a teaspoon of vinegar and 1/2 teaspoon of salt in a saucepan. Heat to 250 degrees Fahrenheit, or until a small spoonful of the mixture forms a hard ball when dropped into water. Remove from heat and add 1 teaspoon of vanilla. Put warm popped corn in a large greased bowl. Slowly pour the syrup over the popcorn, tossing with a greased fork until mixed thoroughly. Be careful, it's hot! When it's cool enough to handle, butter your hands and shape popped corn into 3-inch balls. Place on waxed paper until cool and no longer sticky, then wrap in waxed paper.

Scary Stories

No Halloween party is complete without at least one scary story. Usually one person talks in a low voice while everyone else crowds together on the floor or around a fire. The following is a retelling of a tale told in Britain and in North Carolina and Virginia.

"What Do You Come For?"

There was an old woman who lived all by herself, and she was very lonely. Sitting in the kitchen one night, she said, "Oh, I wish I had some company."

No sooner had she spoken than down the chimney tumbled two feet from which the flesh had rotted. The old woman's eyes bulged with terror.

Then two legs dropped to the hearth and attached themselves to the feet.

Then a body tumbled down, then two arms, and a man's head.

As the old woman watched, the parts came together into a great, tall man. The man danced around and around the room. Faster and faster he went. Then he stopped, and he looked into her eyes.

"What do you come for? she asked in a small voice that shivered and shook.

"What do I come for?" he said. "I come for YOU!"

The narrator shouts and jumps at the person near him!

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Chinese New Year

(Sometime between Jan. 21 - Feb. 19)

Gung Hay Fat Choy! This is the Chinese greeting for the New Year celebrated in the beginning of the year. From ancient times to the present, Chinese people have been welcoming in the New Year and chasing away the evil spirits by setting off firecrackers. Large crowds gather in the narrow streets of Chinatown in New York, San Francisco and other cities where Chinese have settled. A huge cloth dragon sways back and forth around the street corners, chasing a red sunball or a white pearl-ball. Following the dragon are people playing drums and gongs, and lion dancers with paper lion heads on sticks. As they dance, store and business owners come outside to give them money.

In China, New Year is the most important holiday, and it is observed by Chinese all over the world.

The holiday has added significance because every Chinese celebrates his/her birthday on New Year, regardless of the month in which he or she was actually born.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Mardi Gras

(It takes place at the end of a long carnival season that begins on January 6. The climax is on the day before the Christian season of Lent, called "Shrove Tuesday")

Mardi Gras, from the French words meaning "Fat Tuesday," combines religious tradition with a carnival or festival to welcome spring.

In 1829, some young men returned to New Orleans, Louisiana, from a visit to Paris. Carrying on a lively French custom, they dressed in costumes and masks and paraded through the narrow streets of the French Quarter of New Orleans. More people joined and followed them until they caught the attention of the ladies of the town, who leaned over their balconies and threw chocolates and kisses to them. From that time on, masked walking parades became fashionable in New Orleans in the springtime.

The festivals became more organized and elaborate. In 1857, a group of people calling themselves "The Mystick Crewe of Comus" made their way through the streets on floats pulled by horses. One float was carrying the king of the Crewe on a throne and another carried a devil sitting among flames made from paper and representing hell.

Later, a person of true royal blood found his way into the festival. Alexis Alexandrovich Romanov, the brother of the heir to the Russian throne, visited New York and fell in love with an American actress named Lydia Thompson. He followed her to New Orleans, where the Mardi Gras was being planned. When the planners discovered that a royal person was attending the noisy festivities a float was added for a new king, "Rex."

That year, 1872, set the pattern for the boisterous fashion in which the Mardi Gras is celebrated today. Purple, green and gold became the official holiday colors. The Grand Duke Alexis was surprised and honored to sit on the float and play the role of Rex. Alexis and Lydia probably never even met, but they began a tradition. Rex and his queen are chosen each year to ride on the largest float. They are masked and in costume. Those around the royalty, called "maskers," toss "throw-outs" to the crowd in response to the traditional cry, "Throw me something!" The "throw-outs" are large tin coins, plastic beads and other trinkets.

The holiday had become a full carnival by the time Alexis participated. The word "carnival" comes from the Latin and means "take away the meat." It is a time of merry-making and intense fun because "Fat Tuesday" is the last day that Catholics can eat meat before Lent. "Ash Wednesday" officially marks the beginning of Lent, the forty-day period of fasting before Easter. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "lengten-tid" (a lengthening time).

Although Mardi Gras in New Orleans may be considered by some a minor version of "carnival" in Brazil and other Latin countries, Americans are no less enthusiastic in having a good time and enjoying themselves to the fullest during the festivities!

It is a federal holiday in Alabama, Florida and in 8 counties of Louisiana.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

St. Patrick's Day

(March 17 or the preceding Saturday)

Many people who immigrated to the United States have come from Ireland. More than one-half of the soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War had Irish ancestors. Today, it is said, Irish descendants in the United States put on a noisier and bigger St. Patrick's Day celebration than the people in Ireland. Every year on March 17 or the preceding Saturday, cities with a large population of Irish Americans have parades. Green is one of the national colors of Ireland and also one of the signs of spring. Green stripes are painted on the streets where the parade will travel. People wear green shirts, ties, hair ribbons and hats. Many American bars even serve green beer on that day!

Just like many other holidays in the United States, St. Patrick's Day has its origins in ancient times. A young boy named Patrick lived in the British Isles, a land that had been invaded and conquered first by the Romans and then by Germanic tribes. Patrick was captured and taken as a slave from the British Isles to what is now Ireland. He lived there for several years herding sheep. He was a religious boy and he prayed that he would someday return to his homeland.

Legend has it that one night while he was praying, a voice told him to escape from the farm, and find a ship that was waiting for him two hundred miles away. Patrick got to the ship, sailed to Europe, and disembarked in what is now probably France. He led several of the ship's crew through a dangerous forest, praying all the time. Neither Patrick nor any member of his crew was captured. When some of the men were about to die of starvation, wild animals appeared for them to eat. Events such as these appeared to be miracles and gave rise to later legends surrounding Patrick.

At home, Patrick felt that he was called by God to perform an important mission. He believed it was his duty to go back to Ireland and convert the Celtic people to the Christian religion.

Patrick arrived in Ireland and became a missionary, travelling from village to village and talking about his faith. Once, several members of a tribe approached Patrick and told him that they found it difficult to understand and believe in the Holy Trinity. Patrick thought a moment, then stooped down and picked one of the plentiful shamrocks growing wild around Ireland. "Here are three leaves," he said, "yet it is one plant. Imagine the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as each of these leaves. Here they are, yet they are one plant." The tribesmen understood, because Patrick had used a familiar object to explain. From that time on, the shamrock has been a revered symbol of Ireland.

Stories of Saint Patrick, for by then he was a saint, reached far and wide. His most famous feat is forcing the snakes out of the entire country of Ireland. Even though there are many different stories about how he accomplished such a task, it is probably not true.

St. Patrick died on March 17 and the Irish people set aside the day to mourn. He became the patron saint of Ireland. Mourning turned to commemorating him and celebrating his life. Americans have inherited this custom. On St. Patrick's Day in the United States, millions of people celebrate whether they are Irish or not!

The Leprechaun

The leprechaun is a tiny elf connected with St. Patrick's Day. The word 'leprechaun' is from a mixture of 'luchorpan' or 'small person' and a word meaning 'one-shoemaker.' As a St. Patrick's Day symbol, the leprechaun is a smiling, merry little elf. However, legend tells us that he is always grumpy, untrustworthy and very tricky. In ancient myths, the leprechaun guards a hidden pot of gold which humans try to find but without success. As one story goes, an Irishman caught a leprechaun, managed to make him reveal which tree his pot of gold was buried under. The Irishman tied a red handkerchief around the trunk of it so he would remember the location when he went away to find a shovel. When he returned, he found that the leprechaun had tied a red handkerchief exactly like his own around every other tree in the forest!

*May the road rise up to meet you,
may the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and the rain fall soft upon your fields,
and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

An Irish blessing

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Cinco de Mayo

(May 5)

On May 5, Los Angeles, California is alive with color, laughter and dancing. More than 500,000 Mexicans and Americans of Mexican origin are celebrating Cinco de Mayo or the "Fifth of May." It is an occasion which Mexicans and Americans share to emphasize the friendship between their two countries.

The holiday originated with a surprising battle. In 1861, France, England and Spain sent ships to Mexico to settle a debt. Within a few months, an agreement was reached and the British and Spanish navy set sail toward home. But the French ships, by order of Napoleon III, began an attack. On May 5, 1862, 6000 soldiers under the commander of the French forces tried to capture the forts of Loreto and Guadalupe in Puebla de Los Angeles, Mexico. Two thousand Mexican men, led by General Ignacio Zaragoza, fought back hard and held the fort. Although smaller in number, the Mexican army won this battle but they did not win the war. The French conquered the country, and in 1864, a European emperor was put on the Mexican throne. Three years later, after a reign filled with problems, the emperor was deposed and killed.

Even during the short period of French rule, the Mexicans celebrated Cinco de Mayo. They changed the name of the town where the French were defeated to Puebla de Zaragoza.

Today Americans participate in activities organized for "Cinco de Mayo." In Los Angeles, the celebration takes place in the streets outside City Hall where Mexican orchestras and local bands play Mexican patriotic songs. The streets are colored in red, white and green - the colors of the Mexican flag. Young boys are proud to be seen in Mexican clothing and girls wear red and green ruffled dresses with wide skirts. Famous musicians play popular and familiar tunes on their guitars while dancers spin around and click their castanets.

A temporary stage at the steps of City Hall is decorated with a picture of General Zaragoza, flanked by Mexican and American flags. Mexican dignitaries are guests of honor, pleased to hear the mayor of Los Angeles making a speech in Spanish. Later, celebrants stroll through the streets to the old section of the city. Others go to city parks where sports events, dances and picnics featuring Mexican food are taking place.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Native American Pow-Wows

(March - August)

"The spirit of the pow-wow is a continuum in Indian life. It isn't just for a few days in March. We live this spirit on a daily basis. It is why we have survived for so long. At one time we were a forgotten people, but I think we are getting stronger. From the powwow we gain strength as Indian people, individually and collectively, to go on into the 21st century."

- Linday Yardley, Taos Pueblo Indian

"Pow-wow" is the Algonquin Indian word for "ceremony", but the word holds a different meaning according to each native American Indian tribe. Most were religious or war pow-wows, with ceremonial dancing and sacred rituals. Until this century, non-Indians usually did not participate in the pow-wows.

In 1951, in Sheridan, Wyoming, Lucy Yellowmule was elected Queen of the Sheridan Rodeo. This was an annual exhibition where cowboys showed their skills of calf-roping and horseback riding. Lucy was the first Native American to be queen, and this marked the beginning of a new and better relationship between Native Americans and the rest of society. Lucy Yellowmule and a group of Native Americans traveled around the United States, speaking to large groups about her success at the Rodeo and her Crow traditions. Two years after her victory, All-American Indian Days was established. It became a three-day annual event with competitions in tepee-building and bread frying and a Miss Indian America contest. Now in Sheridan, the United Tribes International Pow-wow takes place in late August, the final pow-wow of hundreds throughout the spring and summer. The annual Denver Pow-wow in March begins the season of pow-wows. In 1990, it attracted thirty-thousand people, half of whom were not Native Americans. In the huge Denver Coliseum different tribes sing songs that have been passed down for thousands of years. They are accompanied by the beat of a large drum, played by five to ten drummers. Dancers of different tribes show their skills. There are dancers with strips of tin sewn onto their costumes or bells on their wrists and ankles. Dancers with fancy shawls look like delicate flying birds as they raise their cloth-covered arms to the beat of the drums. Grass dancers wear costumes of brightly-colored yarn, representing meadow grass.

Pow-wows mean different things to different people. They are still religious or war celebrations, but themes and goals have changed with the times. Now instead of giving thanks to their gods for a war victory, Indians honor those of their tribes who have served in the American armed forces. Young people return from the bigger cities to learn traditional dances and songs in order to keep their heritage alive. People who are not Native Americans are not only welcomed, they are encouraged to participate in the activities.

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Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

Other American Celebrations

Although the United States is young compared to other countries, its culture and traditions are rich because of the contributions made by the many groups of people who have come to its shores over the past two centuries. Hundreds of regional holidays have originated from the geography, climate and history of the different parts of the country. Each state holds its own annual fair with local themes and music; and some celebrate the day on which they joined the Union and became a state.

Throughout the northeastern states, the main attractions are festivals that welcome in the autumn as the leaves on the trees begin to turn red, orange and yellow. Warner, New Hampshire holds a Fall Foliage Festival which offers a wood-chopping contest and an auction. Towns in Vermont welcome tourists who drive along the scenic mountain roads to view the fiery colors of the leaves. When the weather becomes chillier, and snow begins to fall, skiing tournaments attract professional and amateur skiers in hilly towns such as Stratton, Vermont.

The leaves turn colors a little later in October in Bedford, Pennsylvania where the townspeople celebrate the fall foliage by demonstrating ways of cooking that have been handed down to them by their ancestors. In the nearby Pennsylvania Dutch region, people are proud of their European ancestry, and celebrate it through seasonal festivals. In Kutztown and other rural Pennsylvania towns, spring festivals are common, with costumed pageants and parades.

Farther south, battles are re-enacted in historical celebrations such as the Revolutionary War Days in Waldorf, Maryland. Confederate Civil War general Robert E. Lee's birthday is commemorated in January in various southern states, while other southern states observe Confederate Memorial Day in April or June. People in many southern states welcome spring with dancing. Celebrants of the Dixie Holiday in Shreveport, Louisiana carry on the early American tradition of square dancing; and in the National Square Dance Festival in Slade, Kentucky, dancers, singers and musicians enter competition in hopes of winning awards. In Biloxi, Mississippi, celebrants even dance in the streets during the festival marking the blessing of the shrimp fleet in June. A mass is held as well, in thanks for the fish harvested from the Gulf of Mexico.

Folk fairs in the American Midwest offer foods of ethnic diversity, because people of so many different nationalities have settled there. In May, the townspeople of Orange City, Iowa and Holland, Michigan celebrate their Dutch ancestry through a yearly Tulip Festival.

African Americans have begun to observe Kwanzaa, a holiday based on the African celebration of the first harvest of the year, December 26 through January 1. Developed in 1966, by a black studies professor at California State University, Maulana Karenga, Kwanzaa celebrates the unity and development of the African community. Founded upon the "Nguzo Saba," or the seven principles of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith, Kwanzaa encourages African Americans to think about their African roots in addition to their present-day life in America. African Americans will exchange gifts as rewards for their achievements; and they will light the "Mishumaa Saba" or seven candles to remind them of the seven principles which unite them.

Winters are long in many midwestern states, so winter festivals have become social events. In St. Paul, Minnesota, the Winter Carnival offers exhibitions in skating, skiing, ice fishing and even snowmobile races. In Houghton Lake, Michigan, a winter festival called Tip-Up-Town USA offers a contest for the best sculpture carved in ice!

Farther west, in the summer, religious ceremonies mark the Mormon Miracle Pageant in Manti, Utah. In St. Maries, Idaho during Paul Bunyan Days in August, townspeople commemorate this legendary American lumberjack by holding tree-cutting contests. Aspen, Colorado holds the annual summer Music Festival where musicians of classical and contemporary music can perform or hold classes. The coastal town of Santa Barbara, California pays tribute to the early settlers who came from Spain, by performing historical plays during the Old Spanish Days in August. The northwestern state of Oregon boasts a rose festival in Portland, where bands play music in a parade of flowers and floats. In nearby Washington, spring is welcomed in with a Daffodil Festival offering a parade of floats made from these brilliant yellow flowers.

Spring in the southwest finds the townspeople of Okeene, Oklahoma catching snakes in the Rattlesnake Roundup. In Houston, Texans come to the Astrodome to see cowboys ride horses and rope cattle during the Livestock Show and Rodeo. Visitors watch the Hopi Indians carry on their strong tradition of rain dancing, a combination of dancing and prayer to invoke rain in a hot, dry August. Many other holidays of the southwest offer a western theme. Tombstone, Arizona celebrates Helidorado Days in the autumn, while in Tucson, cowboys and Indians show their skills in La Festival de los Vaqueros, or the Cowboy Festival. Lincoln, New Mexico holds Pony Express races in honor of the first U.S. mail system and a fiddlers' convention as part of Lincoln County Days.

Alaska and Hawaii, the two youngest states, have climates and histories different from each other and the rest of the country. Nome, Alaska has daylight almost twenty-four hours a day in June, so raft races and midnight baseball games are the main events in the Midnight Sun Festival. In Kodiak, a King Crab Festival during crabharvesting season in May, and the Iceworm Festival in Cordova offers airboat races.

Hawaii is warm the year round, and flower festivals were held there even before it became a state. The Narcissus Festival in April has Chinese origins. "Lei Day is May Day" say the celebrants on May first. However, the lei, a large colorful garland of orchids worn around the neck, is a sign of friendship and welcome for visitors to the islands all year. The biggest celebration of the year is the legal holiday Kamehameha Day on June 11. The festivities begin outside Iolani, the only palace in America, when members of Hawaiian societies and organisations sing and chant ancient praises for King Kamehameha the First, who established a unified kingdom of islands by 1810. Honolulu begins to fill with enormous floats, on which costumed people stand among scenes from the history of Hawaii. Someone is chosen every year to sit on the main float and represent King Kamehameha the First, who was the first of five monarchs to rule Hawaii over a hundred years.

These are only a small representation of the hundreds of holidays and celebrations observed throughout the United States. Each state has its own individual history and people, and the right to celebrate its own tradition. But one thing is certain - all Americans welcome you to celebrate with them!

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