

## Today in Columbus History:

For Mother's Day, here's story not only about the mother of several children, but the "mother" of our next big holiday. It also departs from our usual sourcing from the Digital Library of Georgia. On May 8, 1866, the *Baltimore Sun* ran a story entitled "Memorial Anniversary" that appears to be the first use of the name "Memorial Day" regarding the holiday we will be observing later this month. The article credits "a lady in Columbus, Georgia," referring to the former Mary Ann Howard, wife of Col. Charles J. Williams and mother of Charles H., Caroline, Mary, and Lila.

Earlier that year, Mrs. Williams wrote a letter asking the press for help in publicizing the plan of the ladies of Columbus to decorate the graves of the fallen soldiers of the late war. Both the *Enquirer* and *Sun* printed her letter on March 11. The ladies of Columbus decided on April 26 for their observance and ladies across the South responded. However, those responses varied.

While most simply decorated the graves of Southern soldiers, in Columbus, Mississippi and Macon, Georgia, they decorated Northern graves, as well. These outliers were widely reported and welcomed in the North as gestures of reconciliation between the formerly warring sections.

However, in Augusta, Georgia, the authorities prevented a group of former slaves from decorating Northern graves in that city on April 26. This was also widely reported throughout the country. Former Union General John A. Logan, speaking to a group of veterans later that year acknowledged these Southern observances but spoke out specifically against the activities in Augusta.

Francis Mile Finch of New York, inspired by the gracious acts of the Mississippi ladies penned the poem "The Blue and the Gray," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine in September 1867. The poem became a sentimental favorite, read at Memorial Day observances for decades. It appeared on the front page of the *Columbus Sunday Enquirer* several years later.

In 1868, John A. Logan, now commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, copied the tribute and ordered all GAR posts across the country to decorate Union soldiers' graves on May 30. In a reciprocal act of kindness to the South, twelve-year-old Jennie Vernon of Lafayette, Indiana donated of a wreath for a Confederate soldier's grave in that town. She hoped a little Southern girl would do the same for her father's grave at Andersonville. People North and South praised the little girl's generosity.

By 1875, the desire for reconciliation led to veterans from both sides of the conflict participating in "Blue and Gray" reunions. Atlanta hosted one such event, covered by the *Columbus Daily Times* in 1880. By 1892, the ladies of Columbus, Georgia claimed to be decorating a Union grave at Linwood. As reunions go, the largest of them was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1913, with over 53,000 veterans attending. As veterans died off, the reunions got smaller. The final one was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Gettysburg in 1938, with fewer than 2,000 of the 8,000 surviving veterans able to attend.

While not everyone was interested in reconciliation, these efforts were an important step in the healing process after the most devastating war in the nation's history. And it all started with a letter from a lady in Columbus, Georgia.

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*Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.*

MEMORIAL ANNIVERSARY.—The 26th April, the anniversary of the final surrender of the Southern armies, has been generally observed throughout the South by the wives, mothers and daughters of that section in ornamenting the graves of their dead soldiers and scattering flowers upon the resting places of those who sleep in their cemeteries, or upon accessible battle-fields. With little or no attempt at concert of action, there seems to have been a common impulse by the Southern women thus to cherish memories of their lost ones. The proposition to inaugurate this **memorial day**, and dedicate it to those whose memory is naturally as sacred to the Southern women as is that of their dead to the women of any other section, originated with **a lady in Columbus, Georgia**, at whose instance, it would appear, the anniversary was almost universally observed in that State for the purposes designated. In some of the cities and towns of Tennessee and Virginia, and parts of South Carolina also, the observance was inaugurated to a greater or lesser degree, with the intention of perpetuating it in future years.

From the *Baltimore Sun*, May 8. 1866, at newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/373018155/>



Mrs. Mary Ann Williams from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_Ann\\_Williams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Ann_Williams)

### A Touching Tribute.

At the old cemetery in Macon, on Thursday, we learn that the ladies universally decorated the graves of the deceased Federal prisoners, as they did those of the Confederates. Under the chastening influence of sorrow, all resentments vanished from the pure hearts of the Macon fair, and they adorned, indiscriminately, *i. e.* graves of the dead of both sections as the victims of a common calamity. Rev. Mr. Warren, of the Baptist Church, delivered a most eloquent and touching address upon the occasion, and with feeling alluded to this affecting incident.—*Macon (Ga.) Journal and Messenger*, April 28.

Library of Congress, Columbus, *Ohio Statesman* May 3, 1866,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028645/1866-05-03/ed-1Ohio/seq-3/>

### THE BLUE AND THE GRAY.

"The women of Columbus, Mississippi, animated by nobler sentiments than are many of their sisters, have shown themselves impartial in their offerings made to the memory of the dead. They strewed flowers alike on the graves of the Confederate and of the National soldiers."—*New York Tribune*.

BY the flow of the inland river,  
Whence the fleets of iron have fled,  
Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver,  
Asleep are the ranks of the dead;—  
Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the judgment day;—  
Under the one, the Blue;  
Under the other, the Gray.

First stanza of "The Blue and The Gray" from *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1867,  
[https://archive.org/details/sim\\_atlantic\\_1867-09\\_20\\_119/page/368/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/sim_atlantic_1867-09_20_119/page/368/mode/2up)

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The Lafayette Courier, in its account of the decoration of soldiers' graves at that place, says a wreath of flowers accompanied by a note from a little girl about ten years of age was exhibited. The note was addressed to Colonel Leaming, chairman of the committee of arrangements, and was as follows:

"COLONEL LEAMING:—Will you please to put this upon some rebel soldier's grave? My dear papa is buried at Andersonville, and perhaps some little girl will be kind enough to put a few flowers upon his grave.

"JENNIE VERNON."

The reading of the note created a profound impression, and the wreath was deposited upon the grave of an unknown rebel soldier—the only one remaining in the cemetery.

Story in the *Lancaster (Ohio) Gazette*, June 18, 1868, from the Library of Congress,  
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024207/1868-06-18/ed-1/seq-1/>

## THE SOLDIERS' REUNION.

The Blue and Gray in Camp Together—  
The Guests of the Gate City Guards—  
Atlanta Filled with Visitors and Thousands Pouring In.

ATLANTA, GA., October 18.—The following companies have arrived and will take part in the grand military reunion under the auspices of the Gate City Guards: The Putnam Phalanx, of Hartford, Conn.; Sedge-wick Guards, Waterbury, Conn.; Sherman Cadets, Lawrence, Mass.; Washington Light Infantry, Washington, D. C.; Montgomery Grays, Montgomery, Ala.; Mobile Rifles, Mobile, Ala.; Old Guard, New York city; Floyd Rifles, Macon, Ga.; Richland Rifles and Richland Light Dragoons, Columbia, S. C.; Eufaula Rifles, Eufaula, Ala., and Southern Rifles, Talbotton, Ga. A number of companies will come in to-night. A grand parade and torchlight procession will take place to-night, soldiers and citizens participating. Addresses of welcome will be delivered by Gov. Colquitt, Mayor Calhoun and others. The feature of to-morrow will be the parade through the principal streets of the city, participated in by all. The weather is fair and thousand of visitors are coming in on all roads.

ATLANTA, October 18.—Capt. Burke, of the Gate City Guards, nominated Gen. Hunt, of McPherson Barracks, commander of all the troops assembled from the North and South in re-union in Atlanta, and he was unanimously elected.

From the *Columbus Daily Times*, October 19, 1880, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

One grave in the Columbus cemetery always receives particular attention. The little hillock covers the remains of a Federal soldier, and although he died while invading the home they loved, the ladies of the Memorial Association see to it that the stranger in his lonely grave is as well remembered as the men who died defending their homes, and when the flowers are distributed Union and Confederate soldiers receive equal attention.

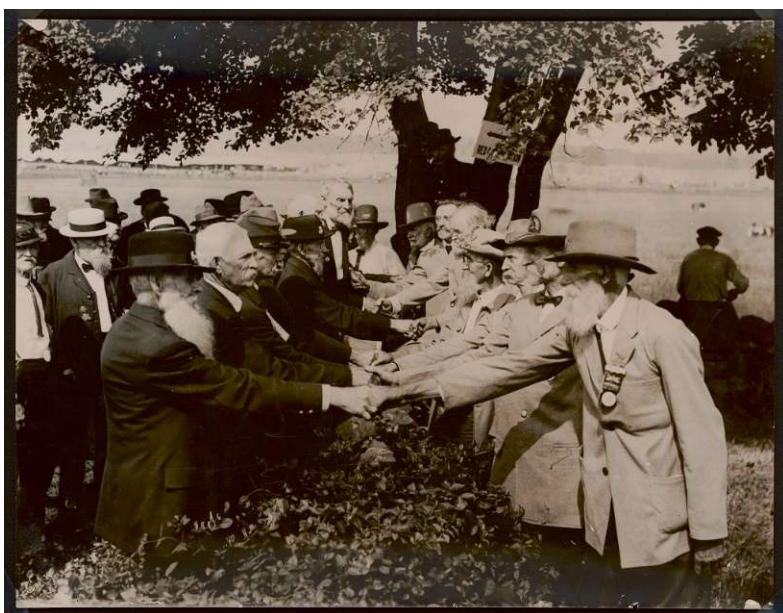
Portion of a story in the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, April 26, 1892, from newsbank.com





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Library of Congress, *Puck*, May 28, 1913, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.27949/>



Handshake at the Bloody Angle during the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary gathering in Gettysburg, from the Library of Congress, July 1913, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018652225/>