**History of Labor Day**

**Observed the first Monday in September, Labor Day is an annual celebration of the social and economic achievements of American workers. The holiday is rooted in the late nineteenth century, when labor activists pushed for a federal holiday to recognize the many contributions workers have made to America’s strength, prosperity, and well-being.**

**Early Adopters: Before it was a federal holiday, Labor Day was recognized by labor activists and individual states. After municipal ordinances were passed in 1885 and 1886, a movement developed to secure state legislation. New York was the first state to introduce a bill, but Oregon was the first to pass a law recognizing Labor Day, on February 21, 1887. During 1887, four more states – Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York – passed laws creating a Labor Day holiday. By the end of the decade Connecticut, Nebraska and Pennsylvania had followed suit. By 1894, 23 more states had adopted the holiday, and on June 28, 1894, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday.**

**Who Founded Labor Day? McGuire v. Maguire: Who first proposed the holiday for workers? It’s not entirely clear, but two workers can make a solid claim to the Founder of Labor Day title. Some records show that in 1882, Peter J. McGuire, general secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, suggested setting aside a day for a "general holiday for the laboring classes" to honor those "who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold." But Peter McGuire's place in Labor Day history has not gone unchallenged. Many believe that machinist Matthew Maguire, not Peter McGuire, founded the holiday. Recent research seems to support the contention that Matthew Maguire, later the secretary of Local 344 of the International Association of Machinists in Paterson, New Jersey, proposed the holiday in 1882 while serving as secretary of the Central Labor Union in New York. According to the New Jersey Historical Society, after President Cleveland signed the law creating a national Labor Day, the Paterson Morning Callpublished an opinion piece stating that "the souvenir pen should go to Alderman Matthew Maguire of this city, who is the undisputed author of Labor Day as a holiday." Both Maguire and McGuire attended the country’s first Labor Day parade in New York City that year.**

**The First Labor Day: The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, in New York City, in accordance with the plans of the Central Labor Union. The Central Labor Union held its second Labor Day holiday just a year later, on September 5, 1883. By 1894, 23 more states had adopted the holiday, and on June 28, 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed a law making the first Monday in September of each year a national holiday.**

## **A Nationwide Holiday: Many Americans celebrate Labor Day with parades and parties – festivities very similar to those outlined by the first proposal for a holiday, which suggested that the day should be observed with – a street parade to exhibit "the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations" of the community, followed by a festival for the recreation and amusement of the workers and their families. This became the pattern for the celebrations of Labor Day. Speeches by prominent men and women were introduced later, as more emphasis was placed upon the economic and civic significance of the holiday. Still later, by a resolution of the American Federation of Labor convention of 1909, the Sunday preceding Labor Day was adopted as Labor Sunday and dedicated to the spiritual and educational aspects of the labor movement. American labor has raised the nation’s standard of living and contributed to the greatest production the world has ever known and the labor movement has brought us closer to the realization of our traditional ideals of economic and political democracy. It is appropriate, therefore, that the nation pays tribute on Labor Day to the creator of so much of the nation's strength, freedom, and leadership – the American worker. *(U. S. Department of Labor)***

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