



## THE HISTORY OF LABOR DAY

**Did You Know** the history of Labor Day began in Melbourne, Australia?

In the 1850s, workers in Melbourne, Australia, began to organize around the concept of “eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation and eight hours for rest”. On April 21, 1856 stonemasons and other building workers in Melbourne organized a successful march for the Eight Hour Day cause. The anniversary of this march became a national holiday whose date was gradually moved to May 1.

Through the birth of the Eight Hour Day movement, Labor Day became an annual holiday celebrated all over the world. The majority of countries celebrate Labor Day on May 1, and it is popularly known as May Day and International Workers' Day. Besides the United States, only Bermuda and Canada celebrate Labor Day on the first Monday of September.

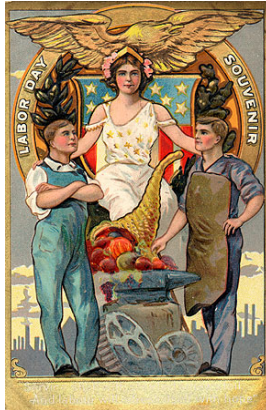
The origins of Labor Day in Canada can be traced back to April 14, 1872 when a parade was staged in support of the Toronto Typographical Union's strike for a 58-hour work-week. The Toronto Trades Assembly (TTA) called its 27 unions to demonstrate in support of the Typographical Union who had been on strike since March 25. George Brown, Canadian politician and editor of the Toronto Globe hit back at his striking employees, pressing police to charge the Typographical Union with "conspiracy." Although the laws criminalizing union activity were outdated and had already been abolished in Great Britain, they were still on books in Canada and police arrested 24 leaders of the Typographical Union. Labor leaders decided to call another similar demonstration on September 3 to protest the arrests. Seven unions marched in, prompting a promise by Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald to repeal the "barbarous" anti-union laws. Parliament passed the Trade Union Act on June 14 the following year, and soon all unions were demanding a 54-hour work-week. A movement similar to Australia's Eight Hour Day movement of 1856, this one known as the Nine Hour Day movement, was born. An annual celebration to commemorate the events was also developed.

The United States history of Labor Day can be linked to the Canadian celebration. Peter J. McGuire, co-founder of the American Federation of Labor, was asked to speak at a labor festival in Toronto, Canada on July 22, 1882. After witnessing the annual festivities in Toronto, he returned to the United States with the plan to institute a Labor Day celebration. With the Knights of Labor supporting him, McGuire mounted the first American Labor Day parade in September of that year. Canada adopted the same date. Keeping the date consistent between Canada and the United States eased pressure on business that have operations on both sides of the border as well as demonstrating solidarity between the United States and Canada.

It should be noted, although records show that McGuire, general secretary of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a co-founder of the American Federation of

Labor, was first in suggesting a day to honor those "who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold," McGuire's place in Labor Day history has not gone unchallenged.

Many believe that Matthew Maguire, a machinist, 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, N.J., proposed the holiday in 1882 while serving as secretary of the Central Labor Union in New York. What is clear is that the Central Labor Union adopted a Labor Day proposal and appointed a committee to plan a demonstration and picnic.



*Labor holiday, a day of rest, originated in 1882*

The first Labor Day holiday in the United States was celebrated on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, in New York City, in accordance with the plans of the Central Labor Union.

In 1884 the first Monday in September was selected as the holiday, as originally proposed, and the Central Labor Union urged similar organizations in other cities to follow the example of New York and celebrate a "workingmen's holiday" on that date. The idea spread with the growth of labor organizations, and in 1885 Labor Day was celebrated in many industrial centers of the country.

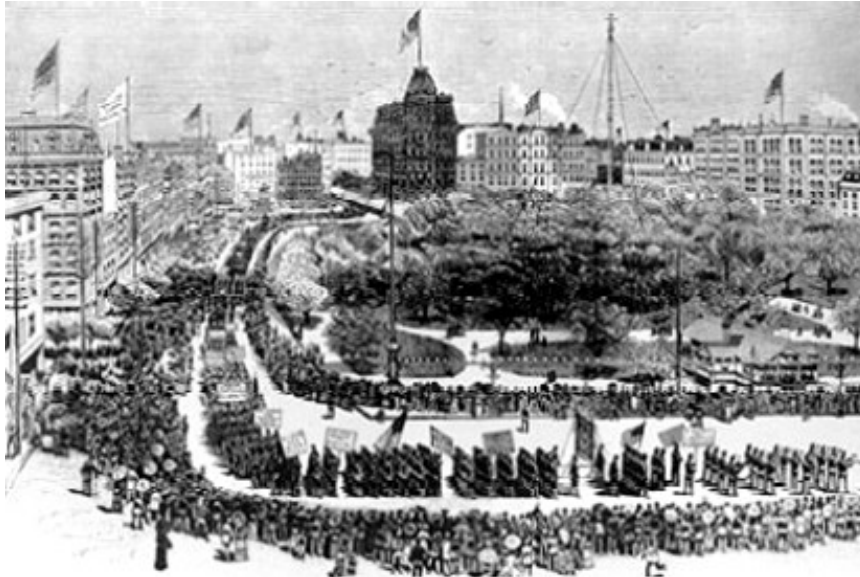
Through the years the nation gave increasing emphasis to Labor Day. The first governmental recognition came through municipal ordinances passed during 1885 and 1886. From them developed the movement to secure state legislation. The first state bill was introduced into the New York legislature, but the first to become law was passed by Oregon on February 21, 1887. During the year four more states -- Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York -- created the Labor Day holiday by legislative enactment. By the end of the decade Connecticut, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania had followed suit. By 1894, 23 other states had adopted the holiday in honor of workers, and on June 28 of that year, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories.

In the aftermath of the deaths of a number of workers at the hands of the US military and US Marshals during the 1894 Pullman Strike, President Grover Cleveland put reconciliation with Labor as a top political priority. Fearing further conflict, legislation making Labor Day a national holiday was rushed through Congress unanimously and signed into law a mere six

days after the end of the strike. Cleveland was also concerned that aligning a US labor holiday with existing international May Day celebration would stir up negative emotions linked to the Haymarket Affair. All 50 U.S. states have made Labor Day a state holiday.



*1893 President Cleveland used Federal troops to stop the Pullman Strike*



*1882 The first Labor Day parade at Union Square in New York City*

The form that the observance and celebration of Labor Day should take were outlined in the first proposal of the holiday -- a street parade to exhibit to the public "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.

The character of the Labor Day celebration has undergone a change in recent years, especially in large industrial centers where mass displays and huge parades have proved a problem. This change, however, is more a shift in emphasis and medium of expression. Labor Day addresses by leading union officials, industrialists, educators, clerics and government officials are given wide coverage in newspapers, radio and television.

Labor Day is a creation of the labor movement and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity and well-being of our country.

The vital force of labor added materially to the highest standard of living and the greatest production the world has ever known and 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.

When you celebrate Labor Day weekend this year, whether by hanging out at home or traveling with family and friends, remember the history of Labor Day, the holiday created for you and all working people.

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**SOURCES:**

<http://www.dol.gov/opa/aboutdol/laborday.htm>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labor\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labor_Day)

<http://usgovinfo.about.com/bllabor.htm>

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<http://americanpicturelinks.com/Unions.htm>