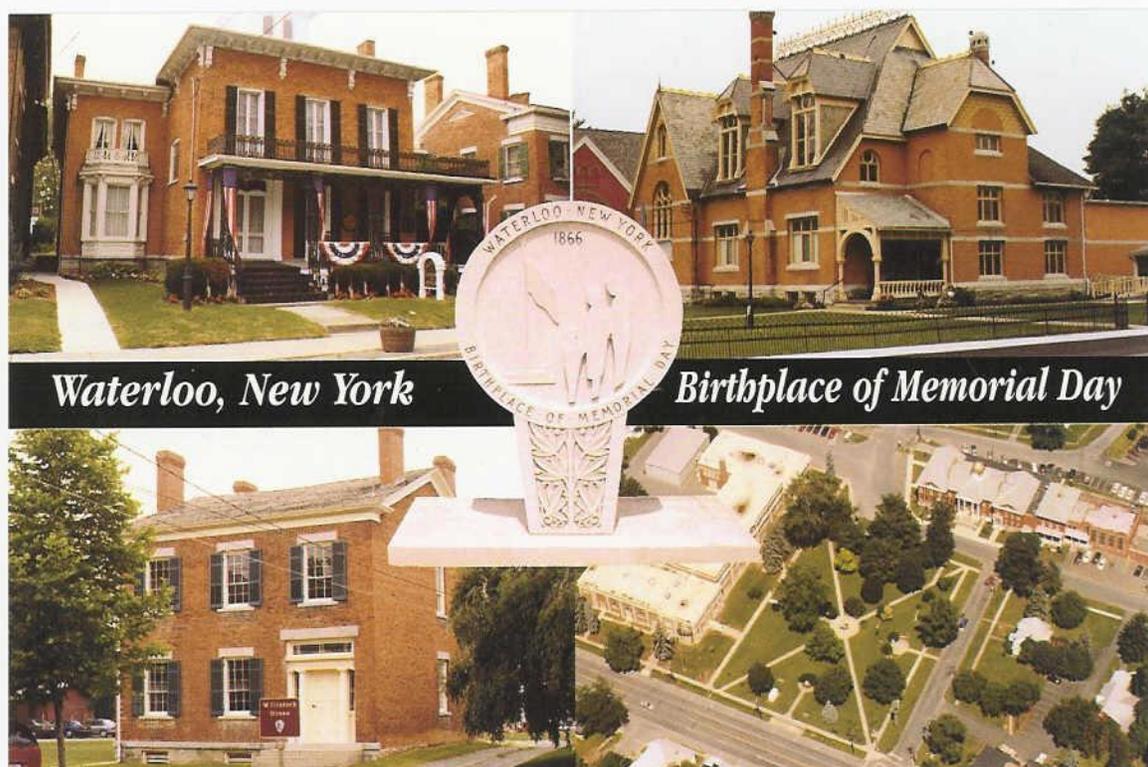


## The First Memorial Day

The Civil War, which had torn our nation apart, had come to an end. In Waterloo as in the rest of the nation the great sacrifice of our most precious asset, our young men, weighed heavily on the minds of our citizens. During the fall of 1865, one of our citizens, Henry C. Welles a local druggist, proposed that a commemoration be held to honor their sacrifice. Late in the winter of 1866, he outlined his idea to General John B. Murray, recently returned from active duty, and now the Seneca County Clerk. General Murray immediately threw his support behind this proposal and the planning began in earnest.



This planning resulted in the First Memorial Day, May 5, 1866. On this day all businesses were closed and their buildings draped in black bunting. The women of the village gathered at Towsley Hall on Virginia Street to make bouquets of lilacs and pine branches. Once this was done the citizens gathered and proceeded solemnly to each of the three cemeteries located in the village. At each cemetery, bouquets were placed on each of the graves of our fallen comrades. Then prayers were offered as well as speeches commemorating their sacrifice for their country. The commemoration was held again the next year and every year since.

During 1867 General Murray discussed our commemoration with General Logan who was the Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). General Logan felt that all GAR Posts should observe this commemoration. To implement this action he issued his General Order Number 11 directing that Memorial Day would be observed on May 30, 1868 and every year thereafter. Waterloo still observes Memorial Day on this the original date.

[Note: This is another in a series of monthly articles on the history of Seneca County published as part of the celebration of Seneca County's bicentennial year in 2004. This article was written by James Hughes, director of the Memorial Day Museum.]