

# Memorial Day (1909)

*John Q. Barrett\**

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In the United States in 1909, the Memorial Day national holiday, also known as Decoration Day, fell on Monday, May 31<sup>st</sup>.

The President of the United States, William Howard Taft, delivered an address on the battlefield at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

In New York City, over 100,000 people lined Riverside Drive, cheered 15,000 parading veterans of the Civil War and the Spanish War, and attended exercises at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. The Governor of New York, Charles Evans Hughes, delivered an address at Grant's Tomb. Earlier, Governor Hughes had reviewed a large parade in Brooklyn. The Bronx also hosted comparable exercises—its largest parade ever.<sup>1</sup>

Memorial Day commemorations involving smaller crowds and less prominent speakers also occurred in cities and towns across the United States.

In the village of Frewsburg in southwestern New York State, Memorial Day exercises began with a parade. A column of people marched from Main Street to a wooden structure, Frewsburg's Union Free School. With seven classrooms and a library, the Union School offered an elementary course. It also offered, as it had since 1896, a high school course. The high school met in a large room on the top floor. The School's total enrollment was about 200 students. The high school senior class numbered less than twenty.

On that Memorial Day in Frewsburg, Union School pupils and teachers joined the parade. It wound from the village to its cemetery,

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<sup>1</sup> See *Whole City Honors the Soldier Dead*, N.Y. TIMES, June 1, 1909, at 5.

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where a program was held. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and an honor roll of soldiers were read to the crowd.

A leading attorney, Walter Henry Edson of nearby Falconer, New York, delivered the principal speech. Edson spoke about the Civil War, and about peace movements. He emphasized that universal peace cannot occur until there is universal justice.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Houghwout Jackson, then age 17, was one of the student marchers and listeners. A few weeks later, he graduated as Frewsburg High School's valedictorian. Four years later, he became Edson's colleague at the bar. They later became law practice partners.

In time, including on the Memorial Day in 1946 that Justice Robert H. Jackson spent in Europe as chief U.S. prosecutor of Nazi war criminals, he made his contributions to universal justice and, he hoped, to peace.

Today, Justice Jackson's remains rest in that same Frewsburg cemetery, the Maple Grove Cemetery.

It currently is adorned with many United States flags honoring men and women who died while serving in U.S. armed forces, and also honoring U.S. military veterans.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Memorial Exercises*, JAMESTOWN EV. JRNL., June 1, 1909, at 7.