LABOR DAY

Every year on the first Monday of September, we celebrate Labor Day. Labor Day marks the end of summer. It is celebrated in every state in America.

In 1882, laborers worked many hours - 12-14 hour days were not uncommon, worked in dangerous places, worked six and sometimes seven days a week, were paid very little, and children worked in factories and mines as well. Unions began being formed to protect the workers from harsh conditions as well as wages and benefits. Each craft has their own special union. Many workers came from other countries where each craft had their special holiday. The crafts would parade to show their wares and accomplishments and have picnics.

On May 14, 1882, the Central Labor Union met in New York City. At this meeting, plans were made to hold a "monster labor festival" to take place early in September when the weather was still warm and it would make a holiday between July 4th and Thanksgiving. By June 11, 1882, 20,000 tickets had been sold for this event.

The first Labor Day was held on Monday, September 5, 1882 in New York City. At 10:30 a.m., workers lined up at the start of the parade route. William McCabe, the leader of the Central Labor Union was the grand marshal. When the parade started there were very few marchers. Traffic went through the parade route and people didn't stop to watch. Suddenly, a few blocks into the parade, the marchers heard music. It was the jewelry workers (200 strong) with their own brass band. Soon, everyone stopped to watch or join the parade. The bricklayers joined with their horse drawn wagons carrying brick steps, walls and window sills. They were proud of the work and wanted to show it off. The parade got bigger and bigger. Soon 10,000 workers were marching. Many were wearing their work clothes - machinists wore their aprons; carpenters wore their tool belts; printers donned their paper caps; others carried signs with what they wanted changed. After the parade, there was a huge picnic.

By 1889, 400 cities had labor days. Several states passed Labor Day laws. Oregon was the first state to pass a Labor Day law, followed by Colorado, New Jersey, New York and Massachusetts. By the 1930s, every state celebrated Labor Day. Labor Day is a day that Americans celebrate all those people who work across this country.