

Title:

Labor Day - What Is It and Why Do We Celebrate It?

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359

Summary:

If someone were to ask you the question, 'What is Labor Day?' could you really answer it?

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Article Body:

If someone were to ask you the question, "What is Labor Day?" could you really answer it? I doubt many of us really know anything about the holiday other than the fact that it is the first Monday in September and is the official end of summer. It used to signal the beginning of the new school year, but with more schools returning to classes in middle or late August that is no longer the case, though the beaches and other summer activities continue throughout Labor Day weekend.

The tradition of celebrating Labor Day as a national holiday is over one hundred years old. From its original conception as a labor union celebration, it has grown to be symbolic of the end of summer activities. It began in 1882 in New York as a parade by the Knights of Columbus to give credit for the contributions to New York life of working class citizens. In 1884, a large parade organized by the Knights to celebrate the working class. The first Monday in September was chosen for the date of the parade, and the Knights decided to hold all future parades on that day. From then on the Knights designated the first Monday in September as Labor Day.

Similarly, the Socialist Party held a celebration in honor of the working class on May 1st, a date that became known as May Day. It was celebrated by both Socialists and Communists, thus in the United States, the first Monday in September was selected in order to disassociate itself from any identification with Communism.

Toward the end of the last decade of the 1800's, labor organizations to lobby state legislatures to observe Labor Day as an official state holiday. In 1887, the first states declared it a state holiday: Oregon, Colorado, New York,

Massachusetts, and New Jersey. In 1894, Congress passed a law that designated Labor Day as an official national holiday.

Currently Labor Day is celebrated in the United States, Canada, and other industrialized countries. Though in the U.S. it is a general holiday, which also designates the end of the summer season; in European countries its roots to the working class remains clear.