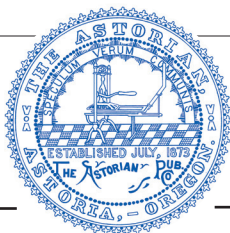


OPINION

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GUEST COLUMN

Memorial Day's forgotten history

In the years following the bitter Civil War, a former Union general took a holiday originated by former Confederates and helped spread it across the entire country.

The holiday was Memorial Day, and this year's commemoration on May 28 marks the 150th anniversary of its official nationwide observance. The annual commemoration was born in the former Confederate States in 1866 and adopted by the United States in 1868. It is a holiday in which the nation honors its military dead.

Gen. John A. Logan, who headed the largest Union veterans' fraternity at that time, the Grand Army of the Republic, is usually credited as being the originator of the holiday.

Yet when General Logan established the holiday, he acknowledged its genesis among the Union's former enemies, saying, "It was not too late for the Union men of the nation to follow the example of the people of the South."

I'm a scholar who has written — with co-author Daniel Bellware — a history of Memorial Day. Cities and towns across America have for more than a century claimed to be the holiday's birthplace, but we have sifted through the myths and half-truths and uncovered the authentic story of how this holiday came into being.

Generous acts bore fruit

During 1866, the first year of this annual observance in the South, a feature of the holiday emerged that made awareness, admiration and eventually imitation of it spread quickly to the North.

During the inaugural Memorial Day observances which were conceived in Columbus, Georgia, many Southern participants — especially women — decorated graves of Confederate soldiers as well as, unexpectedly, those of their former enemies who fought for the Union.

Shortly after those first Memorial Day observances all across the South, newspaper coverage in the North was highly favorable to the ex-Confederates.

"The action of the ladies on this occasion, in burying whatever animosities or ill-feeling may have been engendered in the late war towards those who fought against them, is worthy of all praise and commendation," wrote one paper.



Library of Congress

Preparing to decorate graves, May 1899.

On May 9, 1866, the Cleveland Daily Leader lauded the Southern women during their first Memorial Day.

"The act was as beautiful as it was unselfish, and will be appreciated in the North."

The New York Commercial Advertiser, recognizing the magnanimous deeds of the women of Columbus, Georgia, echoed the sentiment. "Let this incident, touching and beautiful as it is, impart to our Washington authorities a lesson in conciliation."

Power of a poem

To be sure, this sentiment was not unanimous. There were many in both parts of the U.S. who had no interest in conciliation.

But as a result of one of these news reports, Francis Miles Finch, a Northern judge, academic and poet, wrote a poem titled "The Blue and the Gray." Finch's poem quickly became part of the American literary canon. He explained what inspired him to write it:

"It struck me that the South was holding out a friendly hand, and that it was our duty, not only as conquerors, but as men and their fellow citizens of the nation, to grasp it."

Finch's poem seemed to extend a full pardon to the South: "They banish our anger forever when they laurel the graves of our dead" was one of the lines.

Almost immediately, the poem circulated across America in books, magazines and newspapers. By the end of the 19th century, school children everywhere were required to memorize Finch's poem. The ubiquitous publication of Finch's rhyme meant that by the end of 1867, the southern Memorial Day holiday was a familiar phenomenon throughout the entire, and recently reunited, country.

General Logan was aware of the forgiving sentiments of people like Finch. When Logan's order establishing Memorial Day was published in newspapers in May 1868, Finch's poem was sometimes appended to the order.

'The blue and the grey'

It was not long before Northerners decided that they would not only adopt the Southern custom of Memorial Day, but also the Southern custom of "burying the hatchet." A group of Union veterans explained their intentions in a letter to the Philadelphia Evening Telegraph on May 28, 1869:

"Wishing to bury forever the harsh feelings engendered by the war, Post 19 has decided not to pass by the graves of the Confederates sleeping in our lines, but divide each year between the blue and the grey the first floral offerings of a common country. We have no powerless foes. Post 19 thinks of the Southern dead only as brave men."

Other reports of reciprocal magnanimity circulated in the North, including the gesture of a 10-year-old who made a wreath of flowers and sent it to the overseer of the holiday, Colonel Leaming, in Lafayette, Indiana, with the following note attached, published in The New Hampshire Patriot on July 15, 1868:

"Will you please put this wreath upon some rebel soldier's grave? My dear papa is buried at Andersonville, (Georgia) and perhaps some little girl will be kind enough to put a few flowers upon his grave."

President Abraham Lincoln's wish that there be "malice toward none" and "charity for all" was visible in the magnanimous actions of participants on both sides, who extended an olive branch during the Memorial Day observances in those first years.

Although not known by many today, the early evolution of the Memorial Day holiday was a manifestation of Lincoln's hope for reconciliation between North and South.

Richard Gardiner is an associate professor of history education at Columbus State University. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A too-timely presentation

Safety plans were already in place in Santa Fe, Texas, when on Friday, May 18, a shooter killed 10 and injured 13, including an armed student resource officer.

The school district had an active-shooter plan and two armed police officers walked the halls of the high school, according to the Washington Post. School district leaders had even agreed last fall to eventually arm teachers and staff under the state's school marshal program.

Policies and procedures worked, J.R.

"Rusty" Norman, the president of the Santa Fe school district's board of trustees, told reporters. "Having said that, the way things are, if someone wants to get into a school to create havoc, they can do it."

The timing, for Seaside, is chilling.

'Locks, lights, out of sight'

Three days earlier I listened to Seaside High School principal Jeff Roberts present the district's new safety plan to members of the district's board of directors.

"The fact that we have to have a conversation like this is incredibly unfortunate," Roberts said.

"Seaside High School's Safety Plan and What Students, Staff and Parents Need to Know" offers four responses to emergency situations: lockout, lockdown, evacuate and shelter. The plan, developed in conjunction with law enforcement and emergency planners, presents a "plain-language response for any given scenario."

With years of preparation for the Big One — a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami — Seaside kids are well-versed in evacuation and shelter aspects of the plan. Students' "You can't stop this wave" campaign helped raise tsunami awareness throughout the community and spurred passage of the 2015 bond for a new campus in the Southeast Hills out of the inundation zone.

Drills for school lockdown and lockout scenarios are not as common.

Dangerous events in the community, or even a vicious dog on the playground, would be examples of incidents calling for a lockout response. Officials secure the perimeter, while students and staff "get inside and lock outside doors." For



Kevin M. Cox / The Galveston County Daily News

Police officers in tactical gear move through the scene at Santa Fe High School in Texas after a May 18 shooting.

the most part, classes proceed as usual. Students may be required to remain in the building until the threat is mitigated.

The lockdown protocol is used when there is a threat inside the school building.

In a lockdown, "locks, lights, out of sight" is the mantra. Exterior doors remain open to allow access by first responders. Students are advised to move out of sight, maintain silence, keep interior doors shut and take attendance to account for anyone missing.

Communications are kept at a minimum. Cellphone ringers are silent, although students may text updates and information to parents or first responders. Inside doors are locked; outside doors remain open to allow entry for first responders.

If students can safely exit the building, they are advised to run.

If they cannot remove themselves from the situation, they should "fight any threat as a last resort," according to the protocol.

"That sounds pretty awful for us to even have to talk about," Roberts said. "But we want them to know they have to

do that."

Security built-in

Significant changes in daily campus life are already well underway. "It's a little inconvenience now, but it's worth it," school board member Michelle Wunderlich said at the presentation.

High school doors formerly open are now locked; visitors are directed to the main west entrance to check into the main office. Staff or students are empowered to stop visitors and ask what they are doing in school.

New radios increase communication among the leadership team and main office personnel. All staff wear name badges. Emergency response information is posted in every classroom.

Seaside's new campus debuts in September 2020. Security is built into the design.

Each school will have a secure entry vestibule, according to project manager Jim Henry.

Visitors will be stopped, then buzzed into the office area to be assessed. Staff will use card keys for entry and push-button locks installed in the entries.

Entry vestibules will be fitted with either bullet-resistant ballistic glass or ballistic laminate.

For parents, visitors

This conversation goes well beyond students and staff. Parents and visitors can make a difference by discarding their preconceptions about what school was like when "they were growing up." It's changed.

Here are some other ways to keep our schools safer:

- When visiting the high school, use the main west entrance and sign in promptly.
- Familiarize yourself with the safety plan's four emergency protocols.
- Widen the conversation — look at how much this community has accomplished in drawing attention to tsunami awareness.

• Don't lose hope. Every student lost to a shooting is a human being — someone's child.

R.J. Marx is *The Daily Astorian's* South County reporter and editor of *the Seaside Signal* and *Cannon Beach Gazette*.