

The Story Behind Mother's Day

An old brick church in Grafton, W. Va., was the site of the first commemorative service for mothers; today that modest church is being made into a shrine

By WILLIAM WALLACE BARRON

Governor of West Virginia



Church in Grafton, W. Va., will be shrine (left) to Mother's Day, originated by Anna Jarvis in 1908.



MOTHER'S DAY is a very special day all over the world, but nowhere more so than in my own state of West Virginia. For it was here that the holiday began.

In 1868, soon after the Civil War ended, an inspired, God-fearing woman named Anna Reeves Jarvis organized a committee of mothers living in Grafton, W. Va. Their object: to sponsor a Mother's Friendship Day to help heal the wounds of the war by reuniting families and friends.

Friendship appeals were sent to the families of all veterans—both Union and Confederate. And the records tell what an inspiring sight it was when former enemies met and shook hands.

For many years, Mrs. Jarvis taught Sunday school at the Andrews Methodist Episcopal

Church in Grafton. One of her lessons was titled, "Mothers of the Bible," and she voiced the hope that "Someone, sometime, will found a memorial mother's day, commemorating her for the service she renders to humanity in every field of life."

After Mrs. Jarvis's death, her daughter—Anna M. Jarvis—vowed to establish the sort of memorial her mother had envisioned. In 1907 Miss Jarvis invited some friends to her home on the second Sunday in May to commemorate the anniversary of her mother's death. At that gathering she told of her plans for a nationwide observance in honor of all mothers, living or dead.

The church in Grafton was quick to cooperate. On May 10, 1908, the first official Mother's Day church service was held there. Miss Jarvis sent hundreds of carnations, her mother's favorite flower, for presentation to every mother and child who attended.

Mother's Day was off to a good start as Miss Jarvis continued her efforts to broaden the day into one honoring not just her own mother but all mothers everywhere. She sent a stream of letters to churchmen, merchants, editors, Congressmen, even to the White House.

In 1910 the Governor of West Virginia, William E. Glasscock, made the observance statewide by issuing the first Mother's Day proclamation. The following year, every state in the union recognized the holiday. In 1914 President Woodrow Wilson made the observance national by signing a Congressional resolution declaring the second Sunday in May to be an annual observance of Mother's Day.

Over the years, the holiday has spread far beyond the borders of the United States. Today people in more than 40 nations pause on this day to honor the women who gave them birth.

Through the years, people from all over America have been coming to Grafton to attend holiday worship at the "Mother Church of Mother's Day." But only recently have we been working on a plan to return the spirit of the holiday to the place where it was born.

Launched by the local Kiwanis Club, an effort is being made through a nonprofit corporation to establish an International Mother's Day Shrine in Grafton. Funds are being raised to acquire the Andrews Church and adjacent property, restore the church, erect a Motherhood Museum, and landscape the site with formal gardens.

LAST YEAR we received a touching gift from the mother of our first astronaut to orbit the earth, Mrs. John Glenn, Sr., who was named "Mother of the World" by the American Mothers Committee. Mrs. Glenn gave the shrine a sundial to be placed in the gardens that will surround the 90-year-old brick church.

Since West Virginia is celebrating its centennial of statehood in 1963, we hope this International Mother's Day Shrine will become a reality before the year is over. When completed, it will bear fitting testimony to the undying love and respect we all feel for our mothers—not just on the second Sunday of May but every day of our lives.

If You Want to Help

Readers interested in contributing to the Mother's Day Shrine in West Virginia may send donations to the International Mother's Day Shrine, Inc., P.O. Box 307, Grafton, W. Va.

Donors of \$1 or more will be mailed, on request, an artificial carnation—symbol of Mother's Day—in either red or white. Those donating \$5 or more will have their names listed on Shrine publications as members of the Board of Advisory.

COVER:

A little garden helper is always welcome, especially on Mother's Day—as Vivienne Lapham's scene attests. In West Virginia right now, a tribute is being planned to mothers the world over. See story above.

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