

# This Day in History... June 19, 1910

## Father's Day

On June 19, 1910, one of the first Father's Day celebrations was held at the YMCA in Spokane, Washington. It would be another 62 years before it was made a permanent national holiday.

Another of the first recorded US Father's Day celebrations was held on July 5, 1908, in Fairmont, West Virginia. Grace Golden Clayton organized that event.

While Clayton mourned the death of her father in 1907, a mine exploded in nearby Monongah killing 361 men, 250 of whom were fathers. This disaster left about 1,000 children without fathers and Clayton spoke to her pastor about doing something to honor all of those fathers.



*From the 1987 Special Occasions issue*

However, the event that Clayton planned did not become widespread because it was held on July 5, and was overshadowed by the Independence Day celebrations of July 4. Between the festivities and the sudden death of a young girl, the local church didn't think to promote the event and it wasn't held again for several years.

In the years that followed, there were other attempts to establish a Father's Day. In 1911, Jane Addams suggested a Father's Day celebration in Chicago, but her idea was rejected. And in 1912, Vancouver, Washington held a celebration of their own. Harry C. Meek of the Lions Club also claimed that he had come up with the idea for Father's Day in 1915, stating that the third Sunday in June was selected because it was his birthday. The Lions Club calls him the Originator of Father's Day.



*Jane Addams was an early proponent for Father's Day.*

However, many sources credit Spokane, Washington, as the originator of today's Father's Day. Their celebration was held on June 19, 1910, at the local YMCA. Sonora Smart Dodd, whose single father had raised her and five siblings on his own, planned the event. After hearing about the 1908 Mother's Day festivities in West Virginia, she suggested to her pastor that they hold a similar event for fathers. Dodd initially suggested the event be held on June 5 to celebrate her father's birthday, but the pastors didn't have enough time to compose their sermons, so they decided to hold it on the third Sunday of June. On that day, pastors at several different churches around Spokane delivered sermons honoring fathers.



*Wilson stamp from the Liberty Series*

By 1913, a bill was introduced to Congress in support of the holiday. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson visited Spokane to speak at the Father's Day celebration. He tried to make it a federal holiday, but Congress opposed the idea out of fears it would be commercialized. Calvin Coolidge also suggested Father's Day celebrations in 1924 but didn't issue a national proclamation.

In the 1920s, Dodd started studying at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Father's Day celebrations in Spokane ceased. When she returned in the 1930s, she began to promote it again, gaining national attention. Dodd gained the support of businesses that would most benefit from the holiday – makers of ties, tobacco pipes, and other traditional gifts for fathers. By 1938, the New York Associated Men's Wear Retailers founded the Father's Day Council to promote a unified holiday.



*Margaret Smith stamp from the Distinguished Americans Series*

Many people opposed Father's Day because they believed it was an attempt by businesses to recreate the commercial success of Mother's Day. However, in 1957, Senator Margaret Chase Smith submitted another proposal for Father's Day, accusing Congress of ignoring father's for 40 years while honoring mothers and "[singling] out just one of our two parents." In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson gave the first presidential proclamation for fathers, calling for the third Sunday in June to be celebrated as Father's Day. Then six years later, Richard Nixon made Father's Day a permanent national holiday in 1972.

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