

The first Mother's Day

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Photo by Natasha, Unsplash.

By Grace Grogan

Was a Michigan woman the inspiration for the first Mother's Day? The residents of Albion, a city of approximately 7,700 (2020 U.S. Census) located in the state's south-central region, would likely answer with a resounding yes.

Juliet Calhoun Blakeley

According to information found on albionmich.net, the first Mother's Day was an impromptu occurrence on May 13, 1877, at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Albion, Michigan.

The night before, the Rev. Myron Daughterty's son and two temperance advocates were held at gunpoint by an anti-temperance group that forced them to spend the night in a saloon, resulting in public drunkenness. Daughterty was so upset by the event that he left abruptly during the service he was conducting. Juliet Calhoun Blakeley, one of the church's founding members, left her seat and completed his sermon.

Proud of her actions, Juliet's sons (traveling salesmen) promised to visit her every year on her birthday. They also encouraged Albion business associates and friends to honor their mothers by commemorating the event every second Sunday in May. This became an annual celebration at the church.

Juliet's devotion to the church began as a newlywed, when she and her husband, Alphonso, moved from New York to the Michigan Territory in January 1837. Juliet rallied women of the church to support temperance. She endorsed the North and its cause during the Civil War, was active in the Underground Railroad, and allowed a room of their home to become Albion's first city hospital.

Charles O. Mills, pastor of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, honored 95-year-old Juliet as the Mother of Albion Methodism on May 13, 1913. His statement venerated her as the only person having a continuous relationship with the church from its beginning.

A Michigan Historical Marker stands in Albion's [Rieger Park](#), commemorating Juliet Blakeley as the founder of Mother's Day. She lived to 102 and is buried at Riverside Cemetery, block 37, lot 2, grave 4.

Anna M. Jarvis

A resident of Philadelphia, Anna M. Jarvis often receives credit as the founder of Mother's Day. In 1907, she commemorated the second anniversary of her mother's

death by passing out 500 white carnations, symbolizing the purity of a mother's love, at her mother's church in Grafton, West Virginia. Today, a red or pink carnation on Mother's Day indicates the mother is living; a white carnation represents a deceased mother.

Anna and her supporters wrote to ministers, businessmen, politicians and evangelists to promote a national Mother's Day. They were successful, and the governor of West Virginia declared the first observance to be May 9, 1910. He instructed all church members to wear a white carnation on that day. This first official declaration by a government official violated the separation of church and state. By 1911, Mother's Day was celebrated in almost every state.

On May 8, 1914, the U.S. Congress passed a law designating the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. The next day, President Woodrow Wilson made the proclamation. He declared that American citizens fly the flag in honor of mothers whose sons died in war.

Within nine years, Anna became a major opponent of the holiday, spending her entire inheritance and the remainder of her life fighting what she viewed as an abuse of the celebration. Anna felt sending greeting cards was a sign of being too lazy to write a personal letter. In 1948 she was arrested for disturbing the peace while protesting the holiday's commercialization. She stated that she wished she had never started the holiday because of uncontrollable merchandising.

Today, Mother's Day is one of the most commercially successful U.S. holidays, generating a significant portion of the jewelry industry's annual revenue. According to the National Restaurant Association, it is the most popular day of the year for dining out in the U.S.

Others credited with establishing Mother's Day

Frank Hering, president of the Fraternal Order of Eagles in South Bend, Indiana, launched a campaign to observe Mother's Day. On Feb. 4, 1904, he made the first known public plea for a national day honoring mothers.

Harriet Stoddard Lee of California sometimes receives credit for her 1903 action to convince a group of Native Daughters of the Golden West to set aside a day to honor mothers. Her involvement is established in the U.S. Congressional Record of May 5, 1903, pp. 9994 ff.

Julie Ward Howe wrote a Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870 calling for peace following the Civil War and wrote the lyrics to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". A published poet, author, and advocate for better treatment of the disabled, criminal, and insane, her Mother's Peace Day was celebrated on the second day of June, ending in 1912, in Riverton, New Jersey.

Mary Towles Sassen, a Kentucky school teacher, began conducting Mother's Day celebrations in 1887.

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