

2016-17 School Year

## Public School Observance Days

### Background

Wisconsin's 21 special observance days are part of state statutes governing general school operations (Wis. Stat. sec. 118.02). Federal law has moved the celebration of many legal holidays to Monday, however, state law recommends that each Wisconsin Special Observance Day be held on the day itself. When an observance day falls on a Saturday or Sunday, it should be observed on the preceding Friday or the following Monday.

Honoring observance days can teach the elements of tradition that preserve U.S. society and foster an awareness of our cultural heritage. Observance days can be part of a rich social studies curriculum that gives these individuals and events proper emphasis, both in the context of Wisconsin and U.S. history and in relation to their effect on or improvement of our political, economic, and social institutions.

### *September 16 : Mildred Fish Harnack Day*

Mildred Fish was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1902. In 1926, she married German lawyer Arvid Harnack. They moved to his native Germany in 1930, where she worked as an editor and writer and he as a member of the German government. They were leaders of the resistance group "Red Orchestra." After their arrests by the Gestapo in 1942, Mildred Fish Harnack was sentenced to a six-year prison term, and her husband was executed. Adolf Hitler personally ordered her case reopened, and she was beheaded on February 16, 1943. Mildred Fish Harnack was the only native-born American known to have been executed by the Gestapo.

Enacted April 10, 1986, from the 1985 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 232.

### *September 17 : U.S. Constitution Day \**

Representatives of 12 of the 13 original states signed the U.S. Constitution on September 17, 1787. The Constitution, with its 27 amendments, defines the federal system of government and embodies the principles on which this country was founded. The [National Archives](#) provides resources, including a scan of the [U.S. Constitution](#), and the [Library of Congress](#) provides resources that can assist school districts in planning a program on the U.S. Constitution.

Enacted June 10, 1987, from the 1987 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 16.

### *September 21 : Wisconsin Day (Wednesday of the third week in September)*

#### *Wonderful Wisconsin Week - September 18 to 24, 2016*

In celebration of the assets that make Wisconsin a desirable place to live and work, the Wednesday of the third full week in September is Wisconsin Day. The day falls during Wonderful Wisconsin Week, which is customarily proclaimed by the governor to celebrate the state's rich culture and resources.

Enacted April 15, 1994, from the 1993 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 333.

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*September 23 : POW-MIA Recognition Day (Friday of the third week in September)*

Established to recognize those who suffered or suffer captivity in foreign countries while in active service with the U.S. armed forces. Celebrated on the Friday of the third week in September.

Enacted April 24, 2002, from the 2001 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 100.

*September 28 : Bullying Awareness Day (Wednesday of the fourth week in September)*

Bullying may negatively impact a student's connection with school, their engagement with the curriculum, and their overall ability to learn. Bullying prevention is critical to building a school environment conducive to learning and where students feel safe at all times. Observed annually on Wednesday of the fourth week in September.

Enacted May 12, 2010, from the 2009 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 309.

*September 28 : Francis Willard Day*

Frances Willard, a teacher and lecturer, grew up in Janesville, Wisconsin. She was influential in the early women's movement and was president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) from 1879 until her death in 1898. Under her leadership, the WCTU became a prestigious world organization with a membership of 2 million women.

Originally part of court statutes to observe these days and was enacted for the schools on June 27, 1923, from the 1923 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 307, section 20.

*October 9 : Leif Erikson Day \**

Leif Erikson was born in Iceland and raised in Greenland. Norse sagas written 300 years after his death describe his explorations, around 1000 CE, of a land he called "Vinland." The location of Vinland remains uncertain, but it is widely believed to be on the North American continent.

Enacted May 10, 1929, from the 1929 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 82.

*October 12 : Christopher Columbus Day<sup>(1)</sup>*

The first expedition led by Christopher Columbus sighted land somewhere in the Bahamas on October 12, 1492. Columbus' voyages are recognized as the start of sustained contact between peoples in the eastern and western hemispheres. The process of colonization that he began brought new forms of wealth to Europe, expanded the market for African slaves, and led to loss of land and lifeways for the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Enacted April 30, 1929, from the 1929 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 51.

<sup>(1)</sup> Listed as Christopher Columbus' birthday in Wis. Stat. sec. 118.02 Special Observance Days.

*November 11 : Veterans Day*

This observance day began in 1919 as Armistice Day to commemorate the end of World War I. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed legislation changing Armistice Day to Veterans Day, "a day dedicated to world peace." The day honors all veterans of the U.S. armed services.

Enacted June 12, 1929, from the 1929 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 160.

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### *January 15 : Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day \**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a leader of the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Before his assassination in 1968, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to use nonviolent resistance to achieve equality for African Americans. His efforts contributed to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Enacted May 3, 1976, from the 1975 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 219.

### *February 12 : Abraham Lincoln's Birthday \**

Elected president in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was commander-in-chief during the Civil War. In 1863, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that slaves held in the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." Four months before his assassination, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery, was adopted.

Originally part of court statutes to observe these days and was enacted for the schools on June 27, 1923, from the 1923 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 307, section 20.

### *February 15 : Susan B. Anthony's Birthday*

Susan B. Anthony, an early suffragist, organized campaigns across the United States advocating for women's right to vote, get an education, and own property. In 1872, she voted in a federal election and was arrested, tried, and fined for her action. In 1920, 14 years after her death, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote was ratified by three-fourths of the states and adopted.

Enacted April 15, 1976, from the 1975 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 204.

### *February 22 : George Washington's Birthday*

George Washington is honored for his efforts to create a new nation dedicated to the rights of the people. He was commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. In 1789, he was inaugurated as the first president of the United States.

Originally part of court statutes to observe these days and was enacted for the schools on June 27, 1923, from the 1923 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 307, section 20.

### *March 4 : Casimir Pulaski Day \**

Casimir Pulaski was born in Poland in 1747. He came to America in 1777, after fighting for Poland's independence, and joined forces with General Washington. After saving Washington's life, Pulaski was made brigadier general of the American Cavalry. Wounded in battle, Pulaski died on October 11, 1779.

Enacted April 30, 1987, from the 1987 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 11.

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## March 17 : “The Great Hunger” in Ireland

### *“The Great Hunger” in Ireland from 1845 to 1850*

Because the potato was easy to grow under a variety of conditions and a good source of food, it became the dominant crop in Ireland. When a fungus ruined the potato crop in three out of four seasons between 1845 and 1849, an estimated 750,000 Irish people, weakened by hunger, died from disease and starvation and another 2 million emigrated to Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States. “The Great Hunger,” also known as the Great Famine or Irish Potato Famine, is considered by many to be the most tragic event in Irish history.

Enacted April 20, 2004, from the 2003 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 305.

## April 9 : Prisoners of War Remembrance Day \*

Commemorates the date during World War II when the largest number of Americans were captured in the Conquest of Bataan. Customarily observed through gubernatorial proclamation, the day recognizes those who suffered captivity in foreign countries while in active service with the U.S. armed forces.

Enacted November 29, 2001, from the 2001 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 20 budget bill.

## April 13 : American's Creed Day <sup>(2)</sup>

William Tyler Page, a messenger in the U.S. House of Representatives, wrote the American's Creed in 1917. His essay was the winning entry in a national contest for the “best summary of American political faith.” The House of Representatives adopted the 100-word statement in April 1918.

*I believe in the United States of America as a Government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed; a democracy in a republic, a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes.*

*I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution; to obey its laws; to respect its Flag; and to defend it against all enemies.*

—Written by  
William Tyler Page

Enacted June 7, 1935, from the 1935 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 132.

<sup>(2)</sup>Listed as American Creed Day in Wis. Stat. sec. 118.02 Special Observance Days.

## April 19 : Patriots’ Day

Patriots were colonists who wanted independence from British rule. Most hoped to find peaceful ways to settle their differences with England. When the British decided to look for Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who were hiding in Concord, Paul Revere and Billy Dawes rode through the night warning other Patriots in New England. The American Revolution began when the first shots were fired at Lexington on April 19, 1775. Each side said the other fired first. Patriots' Day was established to mark the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

Enacted August 30, 2001, from the 2001 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 16 budget bill.

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### *April 22 : Environmental Awareness Day \**

Former Wisconsin Governor and U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson founded Earth Day in 1970 to organize a national public demonstration that would bring attention to the environment. His efforts made environmental issues an integral part of political debate. Environmental Awareness Day marks the anniversary of Earth Day. Schools are encouraged to conduct a day-long program, using all educational subjects, to enhance the students' understanding of the environment and to promote an ethic of environmental stewardship.

Enacted May 23, 1990, from the 1989 Laws of Wisconsin, Act 146.

### *April 28 : Arbor Day*

The Arbor Day movement began in the 1800s to promote conservation and beautification of the environment. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico observe Arbor Day with annual tree planting ceremonies. Wisconsin celebrates Arbor Day on the last Friday in April.

Enacted May 7, 1980, from the 1979 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 214.

### *June 14 : Robert La Follette Sr. Day*

Robert M. La Follette Sr. is widely regarded as Wisconsin's most distinguished political leader. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1885 to 1891, as Wisconsin governor from 1900 to 1906, and in the U.S. Senate from 1906 until his death in 1925. He was one of the founders of the national Progressive Party and was that party's candidate for president in 1924. A national poll of historians and senators in 1957 named La Follette one of five most distinguished nonliving senators. This day is observed if school is in session.

Enacted April 11, 1976, from the 1975 Laws of Wisconsin, Chapter 398.

\* When an observance day falls on a Saturday or Sunday during the school year, it should be observed on the preceding Friday or the following Monday.

## **Resources**

The [Resource Pages for Observance Days website](#), created by the Department of Public Instruction's social studies consultant, has additional information related to observance days, including Wisconsin's 21 Public School Observance Days.

The Department of Public Instruction has developed materials that can help school districts in curriculum writing efforts. Information about [Planning Curriculum in Social Studies](#) (Bulletin No. 1218) or [Learning About Wisconsin](#) (Bulletin No. 9238) can be found on the [Publication Sales](#) website or can be ordered from the DPI Publication Sales Office, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841; (800) 243-8782, [pubsales@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:pubsales@dpi.wi.gov).

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