



**KNIGHTS
OF COLUMBUS**
IN SERVICE TO ONE. IN SERVICE TO ALL.

**Saint Kateri
Council 12229**

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Newsletter Editor's Message

Well, Labor Day 2019 has come and gone and we are now entering the fall season. As this Council's Civil Rights representative, I thought some history about how Labor Day originated might be an appropriate reminder and topic for the September newsletter.

Labor Day pays tribute to the contributions and achievements of American workers and is traditionally observed on the first Monday in September. It was created by the labor movement in the late 19th century and became a federal holiday in 1894. Labor Day weekend also symbolizes the end of summer for many Americans, and is celebrated with parties, street parades and athletic events.

Why do we celebrate Labor Day? In the late 1800s, at the height of the [Industrial Revolution](#) in the United States, the average American worked 12-hour days and seven-day weeks in order to eke out a basic living. Despite restrictions in some states, children as young as 5 or 6 toiled in mills, factories and mines across the country, earning a fraction of their adult counterparts' wages.

People of all ages, particularly the very poor and recent immigrants, often faced extremely unsafe working conditions, with insufficient access to fresh air, sanitary facilities and breaks.

As manufacturing increasingly supplanted agriculture as the wellspring of American employment, labor unions, which had first appeared in the late 18th century, grew more prominent and vocal. They began organizing strikes and rallies to protest poor conditions and compel employers to renegotiate hours and pay.

Many of these events turned violent during this period, including the infamous [Haymarket Riot](#) of 1886, in which several [Chicago](#) policemen and workers were killed. Others gave rise to longstanding traditions: On September 5, 1882, 10,000 workers took unpaid time off to march from City Hall to Union Square in [New York](#) City, holding the first Labor Day parade in U.S. history.

The idea of a “workingmen’s holiday,” celebrated on the first Monday in September, caught on in other industrial centers across the country, and many states passed legislation recognizing it. Congress would not legalize the holiday until 12 years later, when a watershed moment in American labor history brought workers’ rights squarely into the public’s view. On May 11, 1894, employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company in Chicago went on strike to protest wage cuts and the firing of union representatives.

In the wake of this massive unrest and in an attempt to repair ties with American workers, Congress passed an act making Labor Day a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories. On June 28, 1894, President [Grover Cleveland](#) signed it into law. Over a century later, the true founder of Labor Day has yet to be identified.