

FIRST MEMORIAL DAY IN AUBURN

Excerpts from 1924 Lardner and Brock, "*History of Placer and Nevada Counties*"

The first Memorial Day services in Auburn were held on Sunday, May 30 1880. The legislature of California had a few years previously decreed that May 30 of each year should be one of the recognized legal holidays of the State. This day, commonly called Memorial Day, or Decoration Day was to be observed in honor of the fallen Union soldiers, who died during the War of the Rebellion. The writer had attended the exercises, as carried out in the Eastern states, and also had observed how the custom was observed in the national cemeteries in the South, and how flowers and precious memories were entwined together on those last days of May, and from the greatest general to the humblest drummer boy the fallen heroes each received his meed of praise and affection.

Such good women as Mrs. D. W. Lubeck, Mrs. George Reamer, Mrs. J. R. Crandall. . . requested to carry out as near as possible an imitation of the growing popular Decoration Day exercises for the fallen Union Soldiers. . . The ladies furnished the white sheeting and flags and the older school girls and young ladies willingly sewed on the ivy leaves and evergreen lettering and mottoes suitable for the day and occasion. There was . . . an old soldier not included in the published list, who marched with the ex-soldiers to the cemetery, an old soldier by the name of Hughes, living west of Auburn. He claimed to have been a soldier in President Jackson's time in the first Seminole War in Florida in the year 1835. . . Another comparatively young man asked permission to fall in with the ex-soldiers. He said he wanted to be fair and use no deceit and stated that he "fit" on the other side and that his name was Archibald Brinkely and that he had enlisted as a young man in a Virginia regiment and had fought in the Army of the Potomac under General Lee. (The further fascinating story of this man, can be found on pages 146-147).

Another interesting incident was the decorating of the Confederate soldiers graves as well as those of the Union soldiers, though not officially. . . Wm. Crutcher, a stanch Democrat from Kentucky and old resident of Auburn, . . . asked if all the graves of the buried soldiers were to be decorated. He was informed that only those of the Union soldiers were to be decorated. . . Mr. Crutcher pleaded that all the graves should be treated alike. Some of the soldiers had lived in Auburn, but gone back home and enlisted in a home State regiment. He pleaded that they were all Americans, were brave men and even here in the parade, Mexican soldiers, Union soldiers and ex-soldiers of the South were all fraternizing and marching to the common cemetery to honor the dead soldiers of part of the States.

The writer once heard the following story relating to the long, bloody War of the Rebellion; a story of a taunt by an Englishman to a Union Soldier and the soldier's answer. The Englishman asked why it was that all the Northern States, with unlimited money and resources, with world commerce unhampered, with nearly twice as many soldiers, a great navy and apparently all the worldly advantages in their favor, yet required four long, weary years to conquer the nine States of the South. The cool answer was, "We were fighting Americans."