

PRESIDENTS DAY

Americans celebrated George Washington's Birthday years before his death. His troops celebrated at Valley Forge. During each year of his presidency his birthday was a joyous occasion with balls and parties. In the 1800s his birthday became a legal holiday throughout our country. On February 12, 1892, Abraham Lincoln's birthday became a legal holiday in Illinois. Thirty-two northern states followed Illinois' example.

There are many ways in which our country honors these two great presidents. Streets, squares, cities, and schools are named after them. Washington also has a state named after him and our nation's capital. Thirty-two states have Washington counties. And there are over one hundred post office branches named for our, first president.

In our nation's capital there are two great memorials that millions of people visit each year. The Washington Monument is an obelisk (a tall, tapering, four-sided pillar) over five hundred and fifty feet high. The Lincoln Memorial is built like a Greek temple. Inside is a nineteen-foot statue of Lincoln.

The \$1 bill has a picture of George Washington, and the \$5 bill has a picture of Abraham Lincoln. Quarters and pennies also show their faces. On Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, the heads of Washington and Lincoln are carved in a granite cliff, along with the heads of two other presidents, Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt. In 1971 Congress set the third Monday in February as a special day to remember the Fathers of

Our Country. In recent years Abraham Lincoln has also been honored on the third Monday of February. The day is called Presidents Day.

Schools and federal offices are closed on Presidents Day. There is no mail delivery. During the month of February boys and girls learn about the lives of these two great men. Bulletin boards in classrooms show the presidents' pictures and some of the events in their lives. Children read books about both of them. More books have been written about Abraham Lincoln than any other American.

In some schools children act out plays about Washington and the American Revolution, and about Lincoln and the Civil War. Many read and memorize some of the presidents' speeches and famous words. At Mount Vernon there is a wreath -laying ceremony at George Washington's grave. In Hodgenville, Kentucky, a wreath is placed at the door of the cabin where Lincoln was born. Another wreath is placed in front of the Lincoln statue at the Lincoln Memorial. Then the Gettysburg Address is read aloud.

At Gettysburg, Springfield, Valley Forge, and Yorktown, people remember how these two men changed the course of our country. Both men loved freedom and justice. And both men stood up for what they believed. Presidents Day is a celebration for all Americans. Happy birthday, George Washington! Happy birthday, Abraham Lincoln!