

The National Peace Officers Memorial

... a dream and a three cent stamp

On Oct. 30, 1989. President Bush broke ground on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial at a moving ceremony in the nation's capital. Joining President Bush that historic day were 2,000 law enforcement officials and survivors of fallen officers from across the U.S.

The president's stirring words of support served as yet another reminder of how important this Memorial is, not just to law enforcement but to the entire nation. "The story to be carved on these walls is the story of America, of a continuing quest to preserve both democracy and decency and to protect a national treasure that we call the American "dream." said President Bush. With each casualty is told the tale of a family so often forgotten, the brave spouses and parents and children who pay a terrible price in loneliness and loss." So now each year during the week of May 15, select groups of people gather together to mourn the recent and tragic death of one of their family. Young women with children grieving a lost husband and father, older couples who have unfortunately survived their son or daughter, brothers, sisters, fellow peace officers; so many of them will celebrate National Police Week as participants of a Peace Officers Memorial Service.

Each year a Peace Officers Memorial Ceremony is conducted in our capitol, it is a ceremony that honors the officers who have fallen in the line of duty, and recognizes the sacrifice of those the survivors loved.

We understand that the grief of the loss still lingers on, and such proceedings renew unhappy memories and can be the occasion of additional pain. However the people owe a debt to those who have been killed, and the peace officers of this country want this debt to stay fresh in the minds of our citizens. That is why we must revisit these unhappy memories each year on that day set aside to reflect on courage and sacrifice, and to assure that their loss has not been forgotten, and the survivors are still a part of the police community.

It seems to be timeless and universal, a deep need for people to memorialize those who have died violently while protecting them. This old world is filled with statuary dedicated to soldiers who went off to war, and never came back. Perhaps it's the guilt of being alive, while others have been cut down in an early death.

There are others, however, who fight their people's enemies at home and never stop fighting and dying. So much so, that it appears to have been taken for granted. It takes a special type of person to gather to themselves the troubles of their society, and make those troubles their life's work.

But people have been doing just that in America for over two hundred years, and the American government, until fourteen years ago, had done nothing to recognize these lawmen - alive or dead. The person who changed all that was a South Philadelphia butcher named Abraham Charles Sussman.

Letter writing campaign begins

For over three years Abraham Sussman took time off from his shop to volunteer his services as a Philadelphia Police Reserve Officer. He says he used to get infuriated at the disrespect shown by "so-called decent people" to the police officers. In 1958 he started to write letters to influential persons asking them to help establish a "Memorial Day" for those peace officers who lost their lives in preserving the peace. He wrote to governors, mayors, senators, congressmen, councilmen and many others.



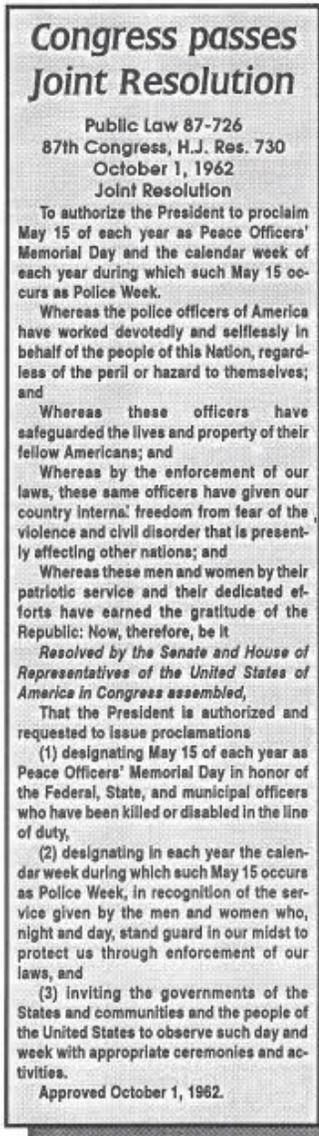
Abraham Sussman

He hand wrote thousands of letters, day after day without becoming discouraged enough to give up. Finally, he received a letter from the governor of Kentucky, Albert Ben-net "Happy" Chandler, former commissioner of baseball.

"He wrote that if I would write a draft, he would issue a proclamation, and he did," says Sussman.

Finally, congress adopts a resolution

The letters started to come in from other governors, and finally Congress adopted a resolution establishing Peace Officers Memorial Day, but it was only for a year.



"I had to work as hard in one year to get support to make it permanent as I had in the past four years," says Sussman. But finally on Oct. 1, 1962, Joint Resolution 76 Stat. 676. became Public Law 87-726. authorizing "the president to proclaim May 15 of each year as Peace Officers Memorial Day and the calendar week of each year during which such May 15 occurs as Police Week."

Not satisfied with his success, Sussman continued to spread the word with pen and ink, and in 1968 had nearly two dozen governors proclaiming May 15, Police Memorial Day.

With some pride Sussman displays the pen used by President John F. Kennedy to sign the resolution as

well as letters from then Vice President Lyndon Johnson and other congressmen recognizing his efforts.

And on Jan. 24, 1990

Congressman Jim Bates read into the Congressional Record praise for the man who had started it all. "Beginning in 1958. Mr. Sussman wrote thousands of letters to many public officials in support of this cause." Bates read. "It is in large part due to Mr. Sussman's efforts that peace officers have received the

high degree of respect that they so richly deserve. Abraham Charles Sussman was the moving force behind this recognition."

On some far-off day when the human race achieves sanity and wisdom at last; when erecting statutes to our most energetic and inventive murderers has lost its flavor; on that day perhaps we shall feel as a South Philadelphia butcher felt as he wrote that first of many letters.

Without a doubt Abraham Charles Sussman was more than a little proud as he watched the National Peace Officers Memorial being constructed. He must surely know that it all started with paper and pen, a little persistency, a dream, --- and a three cent stamp.

No single group is more fully committed to the well-being of their fellow Americans and to the faithful discharge of duty than our law enforcement personnel. Danger is a routine part of their job, and all too often we lose one of these valiant men and women to the sickness that is crime.

I invite all Americans to honor the memories of these courageous heroes on Police Officers' Memorial Day. Our nation is blessed with the most able, professional and caring peace officers in the world. What better time to show our deep appreciation for their selfless devotion than during Police Week.

Ronald Reagan

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