Irish America and Labor Day

On June 28, 1984, President Grover Cleveland signed Senate Bill 730, providing that:

... the first Monday in September of each year, being the day celebrated and known as Labor's Holiday, is hereby made a public holiday, to all intents and purposes, in the same manner as Christmas, the first day of January, the twenty-second day of February, the thirtieth day of May, and the fourth day of July are now made public holidays.

As the language of the bill suggests, "Labor's Holiday" was already being celebrated and the credit for that goes to an Irish American. The only problem is that, from the very beginning, the issue of *which* Irish American Labor leader is responsible for the holiday has been the subject of much debate.   The two contenders for the title of *Father of Labor Day* are Peter J. McGuire, a founder (1881) of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and a cofounder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Mathew Maguire, a machinist and Secretary of the New York Central Labor Union.

The first Labor Day parade (although not labeled as such) had been scheduled to kick off at 10:00 a.m. on September 5, 1882. The Grand Marshal, William G. McCabe of Local No. 6, International Typesetters, arriving at 830 that morning at the designated starting place, across from City Hall, had found that nothing was ready and not even a single member of his own local was present. Spectators mocked the small assembly of union members, while a large cadre of heavily armed police stood by, prepared for trouble. Things looked grim, until McCabe, as he recounted later, saw "faithful old Matt Maguire" running up to announce that two hundred members of the Jewelers Union would soon arrive from Newark, and they had a band! After stepping off with a small vanguard, McCabe would

ultimately be joined by anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 union members. marching through lower Manhattan and then gathering at Elm Park, where an even larger crowd stayed well into the evening to enjoy the "pic nic" that had been advertised with the parade. Amid the union banners hung at the picnic grounds flew the Stars and Stripes and Irish, French and German (but no British) flags. Near the end of the parade route, McCabe joined another Irish American, Terrence Powderly, leader of the Knights of Labor and the most prominent Labor leader in the country, to review the passing units. Also on the reviewing stand, and a prominent speaker at the picnic, was Peter J. McGuire.

In the years that followed, numerous states passed laws establishing Labor Day as a holiday. President Cleveland, after signing the bill creating the federal holiday into law, sent the pen to Samuel Gompers of the AFL. Mathew Maguire's hometown paper, the *Morning Call*, published an editorial, opining that the pen and the credit for creating Labor Day, should have gone to Maguire. McGuire, in the meantime, claimed credit for creating the holiday in the Spring 1889 edition of the Carpenter's Union newsletter, of which he was Editor. McGuire's claim was largely credited in the years that followed, with the claims of Maguire supporters receiving more support in recent years. Whichever man is properly credited as the "Father of Labor Day," the fact that the dispute is between a McGuire and Maguire illustrates the strong connection between Irish America and the Labor movement. In fact, when the official Historian of the U.S. Labor Department wrote about the dispute in 1972, he noted that 1882 had been a busy year for workers in New York, as meetings, parades, and picnics were held on behalf of penal reform, to support a labor newspaper, *or to welcome an Irish patriot*."   Today, as many of us enjoy a day off in recognition of the American worker, we should be conscious of the significant contributions of Americans of Irish descent in the development of the American Labor movement.

Read more about the dispute at: **https://www.dol.gov/ general/laborday/history**

Ancient Order of Hibernians ●

1. When was Belfast first blitzed by the Germans?
2. Who was the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party which promoted Home Rule through legislation?
3. Who was the first Catholic elected to British Parliament?
4. Ireland was formally proclaimed a republic on what date?
5. Who had the leaders of the Easter Rising executed?
6. Where is Brian Boru buried?
7. Who said "Ireland unfree shall never be at peace?"
8. What does Fianna Fail mean?
9. How long did the Easter Rising last?
10. Who had the nickname of "Swagging Dan?"

1. April 7, 1941
2. John Redmond
3. Daniel O'Connell
4. April 18, 1949
5. General Sir John Maxwell
6. Armagh
7. Patrick Pearse
8. Soldiers of Destiny
9. Six days
10. Daniel O'Connell