

# "Decoration Day" an Appalachian Tradition

Every Memorial Day weekend, deep in the Appalachian Mountains, a cherished tradition unfolds. There is a decoration service at the family cemetery, typically Saturday or Sunday, that is called "Decoration Day".

This annual event, rooted in generations of mountain heritage, was both a time of solemn remembrance and joyful reunion, embodying the values of kinship, memory, and community, never forgetting those that gave the ultimate sacrifice for our beloved nation.

The cemeteries, most are set among the verdant foothills of Kentucky, stood as a quiet tribute to those who had gone before.

Families traveled across hollows and counties to return to this sacred ground, gathering not just to mourn but to reconnect with their roots. "Decoration Day" or the decoration service served as a powerful reminder of the bonds that held the community together across time, distance, and hardship.

The day began with a reverent ceremony. Hymns echoed through the trees, and prayers were spoken aloud, honoring the dead with heartfelt simplicity.

Family photographs captured the solemn grace and heartfelt emotions of the day, preserving a world

often unseen by outsiders. They reflected the quiet dignity and strength of Appalachian life that other parts of America seldom depicted in the mainstream narrative.

Following the service, the mood turned celebratory. Blankets were laid out and tables set up beneath the open sky for "dinner on the ground". It was a beloved communal meal that brought everyone together.

Home cooked dishes, lovingly prepared, filled the air with familiar, comforting aromas. Recipes passed down through generations made their way onto every plate, symbols of love and survival.

Salmon patties, a regional favorite born of thrift and creativity, were a staple at these gatherings. Served alongside hearty bowls of soup beans and golden slices of cornbread, the meal was simple, satisfying, and steeped in tradition. These foods were more than nourishment, they were expressions of heritage.

Children ran freely through the fields, their laughter mingling with the soft cadence of stories shared by their elders. Memories flowed easily, bridging the past and present in a tapestry of voices, photographs, and food. The decoration service was as much about the living as the dead, a chance to reaffirm

identity and belonging, to pass down stories, and to celebrate endurance.

"Decoration Day" or the decoration service and dinner on the ground captured the spirit of a people grounded in history, united by faith, and bound by family.

My family always gathered at the Crabtree Cemetery at Mt Paran in Lee County behind the old Mt Paran Presbyterian Church to decorate the graves on "Decoration Day".

It was a cherished honor that my great-grandmother, Minerva Crabtree, took very seriously. She made sure to instill it in every family member that she gave words of wisdom to.

Nowadays, it is just a slim few that follow the tradition. I do it to honor my great-grandmother and use as a solemn reminder that life is short, and never miss an opportunity to embrace those you love, because they will not be here forever, but I hope the simple act of decorating their graves will keep them alive in our memories for the rest of time.

I am glad to part of a tradition that has been passed down from the generations and now, to myself and my son. I hope that it remains a lasting emblem of Appalachian resilience and the enduring power of tradition for years to come.

The photo to the left was taken in the early 2000's with two of my great-granmother Minerva Crabtree's sisters, and her daughter-in-law, my grandmother all gathered at the Crabtree Cemetery for "Decoration Day".

The two sisters have since passed away, but my grandma makes sure I decorate the graves every year. It is an honor. L to R: Elizabeth Crabtree Gross, Betty Crabtree, and Bertha "Tootie" Crabtree Ferguson.



By: Jessica Butler-Iacono and with help from Appalachian Americans

# PRTC

## CUSTOMER

## APPRECIATION DAY

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

10 AM—3 PM

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# CLAYCOUNTYDAYS2025

**Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup>**

Parade @ 6pm

**Friday, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

5:00<sup>pm</sup> Welcome & Opening  
Color Guard Salutes  
Wall of Fame Introduction

**Saturday, May 31<sup>th</sup>**

10:00<sup>am</sup> Car Show  
11:30<sup>am</sup> Pedal Power Lineup  
12:00<sup>pm</sup> Pedal Power Parade  
1:30<sup>pm</sup> Pillow Fight  
2:00<sup>pm</sup> Arm Wrestling



**Friday**

**Noah Peters**  
"The Singing Barber"  
5:30



**Anthony Smith**  
6:30



**Confederate Railroad**  
7:30



**Dressed to Kill**  
9:00

**Saturday**

**Micro Wrestling**  
3:00



**Cody Fuson**  
5:30



**Paisley Grace**  
6:45



**Aaron Tippin**  
7:30



**Coach Matthew Mitchell Band**  
9:00

**MAY 29-31, 2025 - FREE ADMISSION**



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