

Poppies as the Symbol of Remembrance:

During World War I, many battles took place in Europe, including northern France and Flanders, Belgium. In Flanders, the land was ruined by all the fighting that took place. However, in the spring of 1915 many poppy flowers began to grow.

The poppy seed can lie on the ground for a long time without growing, but when it gets moved around it starts to grow. There were many poppy seeds on the war fields and when the fighting moved them around they started to grow right on the battlefield!



Poppies on the old trench lines of the Somme battlefield.

Inspired by these poppies growing, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian surgeon on the battlefield, wrote the poem "In Flanders Field" (see below).



Moina Michael (1869-1944)

In 1918, right before the end of the war, Moina Michael, inspired by "In Flanders Field," wrote her own poem called "We Shall Keep the Faith." (see below). She spread the use of wearing poppies and became known as "The Poppy Lady."

After the war, people started making felt poppies and wore them as pins on their clothes to remember those who died, and to raise money to help rebuild what was torn down during the war and support veterans who had survived.



In 1920, The American Legion adopted the poppy as their official flower to remember all the soldiers who fought and died during the war. They also made National Poppy Day, which occurs the Friday before Memorial Day.

People still wear poppies every year in America on Memorial Day, the last Monday in May, to remember those who have died in service to our country. (In other allied countries, people wear the symbol of remembrance in autumn for Remembrance Day (Veteran's Day in America).

In Flanders Fields

By: John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.



“We Shall Keep the Faith”

by Moina Michael, November 1918

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet – to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honor of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We’ll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields.

