

NEWS



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February 15, 2012

For Immediate Release

2-15-12 THIS WEEK IN ORANGE COUNTY BY EDWARD A. DIANA

If you have children in school or the good fortune of having the day off from work on Monday, February 20, then Presidents' Day is likely on your radar. For many, this mid-winter holiday signifies a long weekend, a time for car sales, shopping, and winter get-aways. But, have you ever actually considered the meaning and history behind this holiday recognizing our nation's highest elected official?

Presidents' Day originated as a recognition of George Washington's birthday and was designated a federal holiday by an act of Congress in 1880. It was the first federal holiday to honor an American citizen and was originally celebrated on Washington's actual birthday, February 22. Following Abraham Lincoln's death it was believed that his significant role in shaping our nation's history earned him a special day of recognition as well. As a result, Lincoln's birthday, February 12, was also recognized as a public holiday. Many states also recognized all of our nation's leaders with President's Day on March 4 which was the original inauguration day. In January 1971, as a result of the federal Uniform Monday Holiday Act, the three holidays were merged and recognized as what is now commonly known as Presidents' Day on the third Monday of February.

Our first president had many strong ties to our County and he made a great deal of history during his time in Orange County. He maintained a headquarters overlooking the Hudson River in Newburgh, and presented the first Purple Heart awards for meritorious service at the New Windsor Cantonment. It was during his time in Orange County that Washington rejected the notion that he should be king following the war, and here that he circulated a letter to State Governors that influenced the writing of our Constitution.

If you'd like to celebrate George Washington's 280th birthday, check out the festivities planned at Washington's Headquarters State Historic Site in Newburgh. Each day re-enactors will perform military drills: Lamb's Artillery on Saturday, February 18, the 5th New York Regiment on Sunday, February 19, and the 5th Connecticut Regiment on Monday, February 20. In true birthday fashion, there will be cake every day. The Headquarter's location is open from 12 noon to 4:30 pm. For more information, call 845-562-1195 or visit www.palisadesparksconservancy.org.

Our great County of Orange is rich in history and offers many historic locations and venues for exploration. Whether you live in Orange County, have guests from away, or are visiting the area, you can enjoy some wonderful tours and adventures getting to know the history of our County – which dates back more than 350 years. To learn more, visit the Office of the Historian's pages on the County website at www.orangecountygov.com or the Orange County Tourism website at www.orangetourism.org.

Until next week, wishing you good health and happiness,

Edward A. Diana
County Executive