History of Veterans Day

Originally celebrated as Armistice Day, Veterans Day was first issued on November 11, 1919, by President Woodrow Wilson, a year after World War I ended. The purpose of Armistice Day was to honor the fallen soldiers of the Great War for their sacrifice and bravery. In 1926, Congress adopted a resolution requesting that President Calvin Coolidge issue annual proclamations on November 11, making Armistice Day a legal holiday.

In 1945, World War II veteran Raymond Weeks had the idea to expand Armistice Day to celebrate all veterans rather than just those who died in World War I. Weeks then organized the first Veterans Day celebration in 1945 in Alabama and every year since, until he died in 1985. In 1954, Ed Rees, the U.S. Representative from Emporia, Kansas, presented a bill to establish the holiday to Congress. Eisenhower, who was then the president and from Kansas, signed the bill into law on May 26, 1954. After having been through both World War II and the Korean War, the 83rd U.S. Congress — at the urge of the veterans' service organizations — amended the Act of 1938 by striking out the word 'Armistice' and inserting the word 'Veterans.' With the approval of this legislation on June 1, 1954, November 11 became a day to honor American veterans of all wars.