



Anna Guérin

(1878 – 1961)

Anna Guérin was born Anna Alix Boule on 05 February 1878 in Ardèche, France. She died on 16 April 1961.

She was the originator of the Remembrance Poppy Day.

Prior to this, she was a teacher in Madagascar; a lecturer for the Alliance Française; and a lecturer, fundraiser and humanitarian in the U.S.A., during World War I.

For services to France, she was awarded the Officier d'Académie médaille and the Officier de l'Instruction Publique médaille.

For her services to the U.S.A., for the Liberty Bond, she was awarded the Victory Liberty Loan Medallion.



Initially, her Poppy Days benefited the widows and orphans of the war-devastated regions of France. She was christened 'The Poppy Lady from France' after being invited to address the American Legion, at its 1920 convention, in Ohio, about her original 'Inter-Allied Poppy Day' idea. Her idea was for all World War I Allied countries to use artificial poppies, made by French widows and orphans, as an emblem for remembering those who gave their lives during the World War I and, at the same time, creating a method of raising funds to support the families of the fallen and those who had survived, thereafter. Now, the Remembrance Poppy encompasses all conflicts that have occurred since.



From her very first job as a teacher in the French colony of Madagascar, Anna began the fight to promote French Language and culture. She was one of the people who helped & shared the quest for this type of education with Gouverneur Général Joseph-Simon Gallieni. For these services, Anna was awarded the French médaille 'Officier d'Académie' in 1907.

Next Anna Guérin lectured in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland for the 'Alliance Française' organisation for nearly four years. She was passionate about promoting the French culture and language; and education. Whilst in Great Britain, Anna was presented with le médaille Officier de l'Instruction Publique by Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador to London.

World War I

In 1914, before the outbreak of World War I, Anna Guérin had agreed to lecture in the U.S.A. for three years; she kept to that arrangement and travelled across the Atlantic in October 1914. Initially, her lectures were under the auspices of the 'Alliance

Française' but she would discreetly raise funds for French war causes, at the end of her lectures. Those voluntary donations were sent direct to the American Red Cross. Once the U.S.A. entered the war, Anna raised funds openly, on a public platform. She raised funds for the 'Food for France' organisation; French widows and orphans; French veterans (medically discharged without a pension); the American Red Cross; the US Liberty Loan Bonds; etc. Whilst lecturing for the US Liberty Bonds, Anna Guérin was described by many as the greatest of all war speakers. Anna Guérin returned to France each summer. The influenza pandemic/Spanish 'Flu curtailed what was to be her 1918/19 tour. She was half way across the Atlantic Ocean when the 1918 Armistice was signed.

Inter-Allied Poppy Day

Anna Guérin thought her fundraising days were over. However, after five days back home in France, she was summoned to Paris. The French government created 'La Ligue des enfants de France et d'Amérique', with the poppy as its emblem. Madame Anna

Guérin was tasked with returning to the U.S.A. to create the American branch - called the 'American-Franco Children's League' (also known as 'American Star').

In each state she visited, Anna Guérin set up 'American and French Children's League' committees. Membership subscriptions and fundraising events would provide some valuable funds, much needed for orphans in the devastated war-torn regions of France, on a regular basis. In 1919, she began holding Poppy Days in the U.S.A. – distributing artificial paper poppies, in exchange for donations. Local women and girls were the mainstay of her operations; poppy sellers wore sashes bearing 'In Flanders Fields the poppies grow'. American Legion National Commander Colonel Frederick W. Galbraith Jr. invited Anna to explain her 'Inter-Allied Poppy Day' idea at the American Legion Convention in Cleveland, Ohio in September 1920. There, the Legionnaires christened Anna 'The Poppy Lady from France'; adopted the poppy as their memorial emblem; and agreed to support her in her Poppy Days.

CANADA was next for Madame Anna Guérin. In 1921, she spoke about her 'Inter-Allied Poppy Day' idea to men of the Canadian Great War Veterans' Association (G.W.V.A.) in

Ontario. The Canadian veterans soon adopted it and the Canadians were the first of the British Empire veterans to do so. In 1922, the bulk of poppies were made by Canadian disabled veterans. Anna handed the poppy mantle over to Captain James Learmonth Melville, M.C. who was Principal of the Vocational School for Disabled Soldiers. In 1923, Lillian Bilsky Freiman's 'Vetcraft' disabled veterans took over the manufacture of Canadian Remembrance Poppies.

So with success in the US & Canada, **GREAT BRITAIN** was the next to receive Madame Anna Guérin's attention. Anna Guérin landed at the Port of Liverpool, at the end of August 1921. She took examples of her French-made poppies to the British Legion men and explained her 'Inter-Allied Poppy Day' idea. The Legion was very sceptical and Anna Guérin's credentials had to be checked out but, before September was out, the British had adopted the 'Inter-Allied Poppy Day' idea. Because it was a very poor organisation, Madame Guérin paid for the British remembrance poppies herself and the British Legion reimbursed her, after the first British Poppy Day on 11 November 1921. Anna Guérin was very rarely credited in the British newspapers and 'widows and children of

French soldiers' were sometimes mentioned but often the poppy makers were referred to as 'peasants'. From 1922 onwards, British veterans made Remembrance Poppies at The Poppy Factory and, from 1926, at Lady Haig's Poppy Factory.

AUSTRALIA was very faithful to Anna Guérin, continuing to be loyal to French-made poppies until 1926, inclusive. The country's veterans had adopted Anna Guérin's 'Inter-Allied Poppy Day' idea before her representative Colonel Moffat arrived so he did not need to persuade, only promote and help organise the Poppy Day campaign. At the 6th annual congress of the 'Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia' in Brisbane (1921), it was declared that the decision was suggested by Canada. Australia's first Poppy Day was on 11 November 1921, Armistice Day. Although Anna never visited Australia, she maintained communication with the Australian veterans, over the years. Newspapers tracked Colonel Moffat's movements and recorded all facts about the country's Poppy Days.



NEW ZEALAND was the most loyal of the World War One Allied nations to Madame Guérin. The country continued to purchase French-made poppies through until 1928, inclusive. In 1921, the Dominion Executive of the Returned Soldiers' Association passed a resolution to adopt the red poppy and Anna Guérin's Poppy Day idea. They ordered and paid for 350,000 of them for Armistice Day but the ship 'Westmorland' arrived too late and wanting to recover their costs, the RSA sold them on the next available commemoration date and that was Dardanelles Day 1922. Ironically New Zealand didn't serve in the Dardanelles. So ANZAC Day became, by accident, the day the Poppies have been sold in New Zealand ever since and why they are the odd one out. . As with Australia, Anna Guérin never visited New Zealand but she maintained communication with its veterans. Many New Zealand women remained 'representatives' of Madame Guérin through those years and they gave talks at schools promoting her idea. New Zealand newspapers tracked Col. Moffat's movements and recorded facts about the country's Poppy Days.

