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Sonora Louise Smart Dodd

The "Mother of Father's Day"

February 18, 1882 – March 22, 1978

- 1882 Sonora Louise Smart is born February 18 in Jenny Lind, Sebastian County, Arkansas. Father William Jackson Smart (1842-1919), mother Ellen Victory Cheek-Billingsley Smart (1851-1898).
- 1889 At age 7, Sonora and her family move to a farm located between Wilbur and Creston in Eastern Washington.
- 1898 Mother dies leaving 16-year-old Sonora and five younger brothers.
- 1899 November 4, 1899, Sonora marries John Bruce Dodd (1880-1945).
- 1909 October 24, 1909, Sonora has a son, John Bruce Dodd, Jr.

Sonora hears a Mother's Day sermon by the Reverend Dr. Henry Rasmussen at Central United Methodist Church, Spokane, WA, and is inspired to suggest establishing Father's Day.

- 1910 Sonora brings a petition before the Spokane Ministerial Alliance meeting at the Spokane YMCA suggesting fathers be recognized during services on June 5 (her father's birthday), with assistance from Reverend Dr. Rasmussen and Reverend Dr. Conrad Bluhm, pastor at Sonora's present church, the Old Centenary Presbyterian Church. The Ministerial Alliance does not feel they have enough time to prepare sermons and the event is scheduled for June 19.

On June 19, the first Father's Day sermon is presented by Reverend Dr. Conrad Bluhm at Sonora's church, Old Centenary Presbyterian Church (now Knox Presbyterian Church). Pastors at other area churches including First Presbyterian Church and Central United Methodist Church also offer Father's Day sermons. The mayor of Spokane and the governor of Washington State issue Father's Day proclamations.

The Old Centenary Presbyterian Church young women's group, the Alphas, give red roses to each father present at the service. Baskets of red and white roses are passed among the congregations of several churches and attendees are invited to wear a rose honoring their fathers -- red roses for the living, white for the deceased.

Traveling via a two-horse carriage and carrying her infant son, Sonora delivers Father's Day gifts to shut-ins.



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News of the first Father's Day is carried in seven national newspapers. Sonora begins receiving as many as 100 letters a day thanking her for suggesting Father's Day. She personally replies to as many as she can then asks assistance from friends.

- 1914 Spokane Advertising Club names Sonora a lifelong member.
- 1916 At the request of Senator Clarence Dill, President Woodrow Wilson officially opens Father's Day services from his office in Washington, DC.
- 1919 William Jackson Smart, Sonora's father and the inspiration for Father's Day, dies.
- 1924 President Calvin Coolidge recognizes Father's Day and suggests that the states observe the day. He writes, "The widespread observance of this occasion is calculated to establish more intimate relations between fathers and their children and also to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations." Father's Day is not declared a national holiday at this point.
- 1930 Mt. Spokane at Mt. Spokane State Park is dedicated as "Father Mountain."
- 1931 Even though red and white roses were worn prominently by men in Spokane churches during Father's Day services, the dandelion became the unofficial flower when members of Martin W. Callender's bible class in Wilkesburg, PA, suggested the dandelion would be a better choice because "the more it is trampled on, the better it grows."
- 1932 Monument to Father's Day is dedicated on Mt. Spokane through efforts of Federated Women's Clubs, International Father's Day Association, Spokane Chamber of Commerce and civic and state groups. The monument consists of a 10-foot tall rock spire topped with a golden ball four-foot in diameter. The sun ball was chosen to exemplify the qualities of fatherhood and symbolize 'children of the sun,' the translation of "Spokane" in the local Native American dialect.
- 1937 Sonora and partners establish Ball & Dodd Funeral Home, Spokane, WA. Sonora is named vice president.
- 1939 Sonora receives "Friend in Deed" medal from Columbia Broadcasting Company in appreciation for her Father's Day efforts.
- 1940 Sonora is honored as the founder of Father's Day at the 1940 New York World's Fair



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1943 Sonora travels to New York City to participate in the Billion Dollar Bond Drive with Alvin Austin, Executive Director of National Father's Day Committee and National Faith Council. Actor Ralph Bellamy presents Sonora with a \$500 bond at a luncheon in her honor. Sonora receives a U.S. Treasury citation recognizing her efforts establishing and promoting Father's Day.

1945 In September, Sonora's husband John Bruce Dodd dies.

1948 A memorial plaque recognizing Sonora and her role in the founding of Father's Day is placed on the YMCA building at First and Lincoln streets.

1966 President Lyndon Johnson signs a proclamation calling for the third Sunday in June to be recognized as Father's Day and calls for flags to be flown that day on all government buildings.

A two-ton granite boulder with memorial plaque dedicated to Father's Day and Sonora Smart Dodd is placed at the Spokane YMCA on Havermale Island. The smaller plaque created in 1948 and placed at the YMCA at First and Lincoln, is added to the boulder.

1968 Sonora receives a plaque from the Retail Trade Bureau which reads, "In tribute and recognition to Mrs. John Bruce Dodd, founder of Father's Day, from her boys, Executive Board of the Spokane Retail Trade Bureau 1968."

1970 Joint Resolution 187 is passed by both houses of the United States Congress on December 28, 1970, requesting President Richard M. Nixon proclaim the third Sunday in June as Father's Day.

1971 Sonora is presented a silver bowl and named the "Mother of Father's Day" by the National Father's day committee.

1972 President Nixon signs a proclamation calling for Father's Day to be observed the third Sunday in June (June 20 that year). Further, the proclamation calls for government officials to display the flag of the United States on all government buildings and invites citizens to observe the day with appropriate ceremonies. Father's Day has officially been observed in the United States ever since.

1974 Sonora Smart Dodd honored as the founder of father's Day at the 1974 World's Fair Expo in Spokane, WA.

1978 March 22, Sonora dies at age 96. Buried at Greenwood Memorial Terrace, Spokane, WA.

1987 Sonora is selected to the Washington Statehood Centennial Hall of Honor by the Washington State Historical Society.



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2009 Commemorative plaque on two-ton granite boulder moved from Riverfront Park Havermale Island site to the new downtown Spokane YMCA on North Monroe Street.

Education:

- Attended North Western Business College
- Graduate from LuValiean School of Poetics, Long Beach, California
- Graduated from Chicago Art Institute majoring in industrial arts and ceramics

Additional Civic Involvement & Honors:

- Wrote and illustrated "Children of the Sun," a series of children's books on Native Americans
- Wrote poetry and feature stories for local publications
- Created numerous dolls in Native American regalia and presented many as gifts, including to the Royal Museum of Romania in 1926
- Author of "Bide Here With Us," Spokane's official welcome poem
- Designated Lilac Poet by Poetry Scribes of Spokane to represent the association during Lilac Festival Week, 1954
- Founder of the Washington State Poetry Day
- Honorable membership Alpha Chi Omega sorority
- President emeritus of Poets of the Pacific
- Honorable Daughter of the United Confederacy
- Member Local and National Grange Patrons of Animal Husbandry; Society of International Quota; International Toastmistresses; Washington County and State Pioneer Society; Students of Northwest History; United American Indians; Spokane Women's Club; The Westerners (honorary); Spokane Chamber of Commerce; Spokane Federation of Women's Organizations; Artists, Authors & Composers of America; Poetry Scribes, Composers, Authors and Artists; American Red Cross