



• *Activist*

## *Moina Belle Michael*

1869–1944

### ***Inducted 1999***

Moina Belle Michael pursued with dedication, determination, and diligence the goal of establishing the red poppy of Flanders fields as a universal symbol of tribute to the men who died in World War I and the surviving veterans of that war.

Born in Walton County, Miss Michael began her long teaching career shortly before her 16th birthday and over the years she taught in county, town, state and church schools. She was in Europe in 1914 when the war broke out and briefly served on the American Committee to aid stranded tourists. She returned to the United States with firsthand knowledge of some of the horrors of war and full of concern for the fighting man.

After the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, she was eager to do some type of war work and served as social secretary for the YMCA Overseas Headquarters in New York City. On November 9, 1918, the Saturday before the Armistice, she read Col. John McCrae's poem, "We Shall Not Sleep" later named "In Flanders Fields."

The poem and its message made a lasting impression. She pledged not to forget the sacrifices of those who fought and wrote her own poem, "We Shall Keep the Faith." The final stanza states:

*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.*

She resolved always to wear red silk poppies-poppies of Flanders fields and began a campaign to make the poppy a symbol of tribute and support for veterans. Her persistent efforts led to the emblem's launch by March 1919. The idea spread to England, France, Australia, and over 50 other countries.

Miss Michael devoted the rest of her life to this cause. Disabled veterans made the poppies, and all the profits went to the relief or rehabilitation of these veterans or their needy dependents. By the time of her death in 1944, approximately \$200 million had been raised for this cause in the United States and England.

Miss Michael received numerous honors including the American Legion Auxiliary Distinguished Service Medal in 1930. The Georgia Legislature designated her a "Distinguished Citizen" in 1931 and the American Legion and Auxiliary placed a marble bust of her in the state capitol in 1937. Recognition continued after her death, including a memorial marker and the naming of a liberty ship, Moina Michael. She valued her honors principally because they came to Georgia and a Georgia woman. For her successful efforts to establish the poppy as a universal symbol of tribute to and support for veterans, Moina Michael is named a Georgia Woman of Achievement.

### **Additional Resources**

**The Athenaeum Club**  
Monroe, GA 30655