

Centenary of Thanksgiving



Three Hundred Years Ago THE PILGRIM FATHERS Held the First American THANKSGIVING FEAST

AMERICA, England and Holland, the three nations most concerned with the landing of the Pilgrims December 6, 1620, at Plymouth, Mass., have been celebrating this year the "Tercentenary of the Pilgrims," and the celebration runs over into 1921, with many interesting features on the program.

So, though the Pilgrims did not actually eat their first Thanksgiving dinner until the harvest of 1621 had been gathered, the "Tercentenary of the Pilgrims," now being observed, is also properly the "Tercentenary of Thanksgiving."

The Pilgrims, as every good American knows, landed at Plymouth in December. Their first winter was a hard one. At one time only Brewster, Standish and five other hardy ones were well enough to get about. Hardships, hunger and sickness took heavy toll from the little colony.

But in the spring and summer that followed, their fortunes improved, and by autumn they had cleared twenty-six acres and made it ready for cultivation. This industry, too, had been rewarded by a bounteous harvest. Now food and fuel sufficient for the needs of the winter were laid in. Then Governor Bradford ordered a Thanksgiving, the first in America.

With a little help from the imagination it is easy to reconstruct the scene in part. The historians have recorded that the first Thanksgiving Day was bright and fair. Of course there was the same riot of autumn color that glorifies New England falls today. Red, gold and bronze leaves hung on the trees and carpeted the ground. Purple wild grapes hung from the tree-climbing vines. Red cranberries were thick on the marshes. Blue gentians starred the meadows, and the uplands were bright with goldenrod. Over all lay the haze of the "Indian summer," and, as the crowning touch, rose into the still autumn air the smoke from the seven log cabins of the colony.

It was yet early in the day when a yell rent the air, and Massasoit and his fighters arrived. Hastily peering into their ovens the women joined the men to welcome the guests. They lined up along the path leading to the government house and cheered with the redskins. Ninety Indians had accepted the invitation. The women rushed back to their kitchens, while the men of the colony wore exchanging health greetings with the "company."

Came a roll of drums, and the colony made its way devoutly to the meeting house for worship. It was a simple, short service. At the door, as was the custom, stood a guard watching over the little settlement. Eternal vigilance, even with friendly Indians present, was the price of life. Then, when the benediction had been spoken, all made their way to the tables of rough boards, hand hewn from trees, set on trestles in the open air.

It is possible to give a good guess at the good things that graced the board. The harvest had been bounteous. The hunters had been successful. And doubtless Old Mother Nature, who had been so merciless to the colonists, was now generous. So here is the possible menu:

Meat Soup	Vegetable Soup
Clam Chowder	Oyster Stew
Sea Fish Lobster	Brook Trout
Fried Oysters	Steamed Clams
Wild Turkey	Venison
Wild Duck	Wild Goose
Game Pastry	Blackbird Pie
Samp	Succotash
Hominy	Beans
Cranberries	Jams
Turnips	Jellies
Pumpkin Pie	Hickory Nuts
	Beech Nuts

The women in their dark gowns, set off at the neck and cuffs with bits of white, with wisps of hair peeping out from under their white hoods,

served and smiled, as women always smile when a dinner is a success. The few children of the colony clung to the women's skirts and looked in awe at the Indians, who had come in full regalia—plumed heads, painted faces and with bows and quivers at their sides.

Dinner finished, tables were cleared and the men rested their backs against stumps to let digestion have its way. But the Indians, who hadn't inherited digestions, decided it was time to dance. So they yelped and jumped and danced around to the delight of the settlers and to the fright of the children.

Capt. Miles Standish, the same who lost a bride by proxy, led out his company of twenty soldiers and drilled them before the Indians. The little band went through its maneuvers and as a climax fired a couple of salvos from their matchlock muskets. The Indians cheered lustily, and crowded around the captain while he attempted to explain to them the mechanism of his blunderbus.

Then, as now, sports were a part of the observance of the day. In a clear space, leaping, running and other athletic games were staged. The Indians laid aside their fur cloaks and the colonists peeled off their jackets and contested for the honors. Evidently no records were lowered, for the official score books have nothing in them concerning this meet.

In the course of three hundred years the celebration of Thanksgiving has become a national custom. Its observance grew gradually and not until the Civil war were our national Thanksgiving proclamations issued with annual recurrence. The president's general Thanksgiving proclamation is now supplemented by that of the governors of the states.

In 1781 the Thanksgiving recommendation took, for the first time, the form and name of a proclamation. On September 13 Roger Sherman, seconded by John Witherspoon, moved that Thursday, December 13, be selected as a day of thanksgiving. This Roger Sherman is unique in our history inasmuch as he is the only man who signed all four of the Great Documents: Articles of Association, 1774; Articles of Confederation, 1775; Declaration of Independence, 1776, and Constitution, 1787.

The official growth of the Thanksgiving Day observance was quite gradual. The Massachusetts Bay Colony officially designated such a celebration in 1630. Connecticut followed example in 1639, and the Dutch of the New Netherlands in February, 1644.

The day of observance varied, some of the colonies holding their Thanksgiving as early as July and others as late as February; but, by degrees, it came to the great harvest celebration, thus preserving the true significance of the first Thanksgiving Day.

The first officially appointed Thanksgiving Day observed by the whole nation was the twenty-sixth of November, 1789, which George Washington proclaimed as a day for rendering the thanks of the people to Heaven for the good fortune that was theirs at that time. Washington had been in office just six months as the first President of the United States.

This document is couched in an exalted strain that should bear its message anew to every American today. After a brief preamble, the proclamation says:

"Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign, Thursday, the twenty-sixth of November next, to be devoted by the people of these states to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquillity, union and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing knowledge, and, in general, for all the great favors which He hath been pleased to confer upon us.

"And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several duties properly and punctually; to render our national



government a blessing to the people by constantly being a government of wise, just and constitutional laws, directly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations, especially such as have shown kindness to us, and to bless them with good government and peace and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue and the increase of science among them and us, and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

"Given under my hand at the city of New York, the third day of October, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine.

"GEORGE WASHINGTON."

There is, as stated, no statutory provision for our Thanksgiving proclamations nor for their date. In evidence of this President Andrew Johnson's first Thanksgiving proclamation designated the first Thursday in December, 1865. If we speak of Thanksgiving day as a national institution it dates back to the Revolution, but if we have in mind the annual harvest Thanksgiving day it becomes nationalized through the adoption of it by the several states, and the first appointment was by Abraham Lincoln November 26, 1863. That proclamation is, in part, as follows:

"The year that is drawing to its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. . . . Needful diversions of health and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and of coal as of precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased notwithstanding the waste that has been made in camp, the siege and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

"No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gift of the most high God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

"It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, fervently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday in November next as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father, who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are now unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and union.

"In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

"Done at the city of Washington, the third day of October, A. D. 1863, and of the Independence of the United States, the eighty-eighth.

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

So it was Abraham Lincoln who first named the last Thursday in November in his proclamation of 1863 and thus fixed the date of the annual celebration of Thanksgiving.

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Hawkins was a greedy, self-seeking fellow, who expected to benefit by his rich uncle's death. The latter had not failed to observe the nephew's character, however, and when on his death-bed he sent for Hawkins.
"I haven't forgotten you, George," he said; "got you down in my will."
At the funeral Hawkins invested in an expensive wreath and attended to hear the will read.
"To my dear nephew George," ran the document, "I leave an illustrated edition of Dickens' 'Great Expectations.'"
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Even the buckwheat cake has to await its turn.

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