



The Pilgrims were planning to settle near Virginia. They were part of the Virginia Company, which had the rights to most of the eastern seaboard of the U.S. The pilgrims had intended to go to the Hudson River region in New York State, which would have been considered "Northern Virginia," but they landed in Cape Cod instead. Treacherous seas prevented them from venturing further south.

The Pilgrims set ground at Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620. Their first winter was devastating. At the beginning of the following fall, they had lost 46 of the original 102 who sailed on the Mayflower. But the harvest of 1621 was a bountiful one. And the remaining colonists decided to celebrate with a feast -- including 91 Indians who had helped the Pilgrims survive their first year. It is believed that the Pilgrims would not have made it through the year without the help of the natives.

The feast was more of a traditional English harvest festival than a true "thanksgiving" observance. It lasted three days. The original feast in 1621 occurred sometime between September 21 and November 11.

This feast was not repeated the following year. But in 1623, during a severe drought, the pilgrims gathered in a prayer service, praying for rain. When a long, steady rain followed the very next day, Governor Bradford proclaimed another day of Thanksgiving, again inviting their Indian friends.

On June 20, 1676, the governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts, held a meeting to determine how best to express thanks for the good fortune that had seen their community securely established. By unanimous vote they instructed Edward Rawson, the clerk, to proclaim June 29 as a day of thanksgiving.

October 1777 marked the first time that all 13 colonies joined in a thanksgiving celebration. It also commemorated the patriotic victory over the British at Saratoga. But it was a one-time affair.

George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789, although some were opposed to it. There was discord among the colonies, many feeling the hardships of a few Pilgrims did not warrant a national holiday. And later, President Thomas Jefferson scoffed at the idea of having a day of thanksgiving.

Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor, wrote many editorials championing her cause in her Boston Ladies' Magazine, and later, in Godey's Lady's Book. Some think her efforts eventually led to what we recognize as Thanksgiving as she ran a 40-year campaign of writing letters to governors and presidents. After the Civil War, in 1863 President Abraham Lincoln designated the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving. This may have correlated it with the November 21, 1621, anchoring of the Mayflower.

Thanksgiving was proclaimed by every president after Lincoln. The date was changed a couple of times, most recently by Franklin D. Roosevelt, who set it up one week to the next-to-last Thursday in order to create a longer Christmas shopping season. Public uproar against this decision caused the president to move Thanksgiving back to its original date two years later. And in 1941, Thanksgiving was finally sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, as the fourth Thursday in November.

Indians in Plymouth

When the Pilgrims crossed the Atlantic Ocean in 1620, they landed on the rocky shores of a territory that was inhabited by the Wampanoag (Wam pa NO ag) Indians. The Wampanoags were part of the Algonkian-speaking peoples, a large group that was part of the Woodland Culture area. These Indians lived in villages along the coast of what is now Massachusetts and Rhode Island. They lived in round-roofed houses called wigwams. These were made of poles covered with flat sheets of elm or birch bark. Wigwams differ in construction from tipis that were used by Indians of the Great Plains.

The Wampanoags moved several times during each year in order to get food. In the spring they would fish in the rivers for salmon and herring. In the planting season they moved to the forest to hunt deer and other animals. After the end of the hunting season people moved inland where there was greater protection from the weather. From December to April they lived on food that they stored during the earlier months.

The basic dress for men was the breech clout, a length of deerskin looped over a belt in back and in front. Women wore deerskin wrap-around skirts. Deerskin leggings and fur capes made from deer, beaver, otter, and bear skins gave protection during the colder seasons, and deerskin moccasins were worn on the feet. Both men and women usually braided their hair and a single feather was often worn in the back of the hair by men. They did not have the large feathered headdresses worn by people in the Plains Culture area.

There were two language groups of Indians in New England at this time. The Iroquois were neighbors to the Algonkian-speaking people. Leaders of the Algonquin and Iroquois people were called "sachems" (SAY chems). Each village had its own sachem and tribal council. Political power flowed upward from the people. Any individual, man or woman, could participate, but among the Algonquins more political power was held by men. Among the Iroquois, however, women held the deciding vote in the final selection of who would represent the group. Both men and women enforced the laws of the village and helped solve problems. The details of their democratic system were so impressive that about 150 years later Benjamin Franklin invited the Iroquois to Albany, New York, to explain their system to a delegation who then developed the "Albany Plan of Union." This document later served as a model for the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of the United States.

These Indians of the Eastern Woodlands called the turtle, the deer and the fish their brothers. They respected the forest and everything in it as equals. Whenever a hunter made a kill, he was careful to leave behind some bones or meat as a spiritual offering, to help other animals survive. Not to do so would be considered greedy. The Wampanoags also treated each other with respect. Any visitor to a Wampanoag home was provided with a share of whatever food the family had, even if the supply was low. This same courtesy was extended to the Pilgrims when they met.

We can only guess what the Wampanoags must have thought when they first saw the strange ships of the Pilgrims arriving on their shores. But their custom was to help visitors, and they treated the newcomers with courtesy. It was mainly because of their kindness that the Pilgrims survived at all. The wheat the Pilgrims had brought with them to plant would not grow in the rocky soil. They needed to learn new ways for a new world, and the man who came to help them was called "Tisquantum" or "Squanto" (SKWAN toe).

Squanto was originally from the village of Patuxet (Pa TUK et) and a member of the Pokanokit Wampanoag nation. Patuxet once stood on the exact site where the Pilgrims built Plymouth. In 1605, fifteen years before the Pilgrims came, Squanto went to England with a friendly English explorer named John Weymouth. He had many adventures and learned to speak English. Squanto came back to New England with Captain Weymouth. Later Squanto was captured by a British slaver who raided the village and sold Squanto to the Spanish in the Caribbean Islands. A Spanish Franciscan priest befriended Squanto and helped him to get to Spain and later on a ship to England. Squanto then found Captain Weymouth, who paid his way back to his homeland. In England Squanto met Samoset of the Wabanake (Wab NAH key) Tribe, who had also left his native home with an English explorer. They both returned together to Patuxet in 1620.

When they arrived, the village was deserted and there were skeletons everywhere. Everyone in the village had died from an illness the English slavers had left behind. Squanto and Samoset went to stay with a neighboring village of Wampanoags.

One year later, in the spring, Squanto and Samoset were hunting along the beach near Patuxet. They were startled to see people from England in their deserted village. For several days, they stayed nearby observing the newcomers. Finally they decided to approach them. Samoset walked into the village and said "welcome," Squanto soon joined him. The Pilgrims were very surprised to meet two Indians who spoke English.

The Pilgrims were not in good condition. They were living in dirt-covered shelters, there was a shortage of food, and nearly half of them had died during the winter. They obviously needed help and the two men were a welcome sight. Squanto, who probably knew

more English than any other Indian in North America at that time, decided to stay with the Pilgrims for the next few months and teach them how to survive in this new place. He brought them deer meat and beaver skins. He taught them how to cultivate corn and other new vegetables and how to build Indian-style houses. He pointed out poisonous plants and showed how other plants could be used as medicine. He explained how to dig and cook clams, how to get sap from the maple trees, use fish for fertilizer, and dozens of other skills needed for their survival.

By the time fall arrived things were going much better for the Pilgrims, thanks to the help they had received. The corn they planted had grown well. There was enough food to last the winter. They were living comfortably in their Indian-style wigwams and had also managed to build one European-style building out of squared logs. This was their church. They were now in better health, and they knew more about surviving in this new land. The Pilgrims decided to have a thanksgiving feast to celebrate their good fortune. They had observed thanksgiving feasts in November as religious obligations in England for many years before coming to the New World.

The Algonkian tribes held six thanksgiving festivals during the year. The beginning of the Algonkian year was marked by the Maple Dance which gave thanks to the Creator for the maple tree and its syrup. This ceremony occurred when the weather was warm enough for the sap to run in the maple trees, sometimes as early as February. Second was the planting feast, where the seeds were blessed. The strawberry festival was next, celebrating the first fruits of the season. Summer brought the green corn festival to give thanks for the ripening corn. In late fall, the harvest festival gave thanks for the food they had grown. Mid-winter was the last ceremony of the old year. When the Indians sat down to the "first Thanksgiving" with the Pilgrims, it was really the fifth thanksgiving of the year for them!

Captain Miles Standish, the leader of the Pilgrims, invited Squanto, Samoset, Massasoit (the leader of the Wampanoags), and their immediate families to join them for a celebration, but they had no idea how big Indian families could be. As the Thanksgiving feast began, the Pilgrims were overwhelmed at the large turnout of ninety relatives that Squanto and Samoset brought with them. The Pilgrims were not prepared to feed a gathering of people that large for three days. Seeing this, Massasoit gave orders to his men within the first hour of his arrival to go home and get more food. Thus it happened that the Indians supplied the majority of the food: Five deer, many wild turkeys, fish, beans, squash, corn soup, corn bread, and berries. Captain Standish sat at one end of a long table and the Clan Chief Massasoit sat at the other end. For the first time the Wampanoag people were sitting at a table to eat instead of on mats or furs spread on the ground. The Indian women sat together with the Indian men to eat. The Pilgrim women, however, stood quietly behind the table and waited until after their men had eaten, since that was their custom.

For three days the Wampanoags feasted with the Pilgrims. It was a special time of friendship between two very different groups of people. A peace and friendship agreement was made between Massasoit and Miles Standish giving the Pilgrims the clearing in the forest where the old Patuxet village once stood to build their new town of Plymouth.

More English people came to America, and they were not in need of help from the Indians as were the original Pilgrims. Many of the newcomers forgot the help the Indians had given them. Mistrust started to grow and the friendship weakened. The Pilgrims started telling their Indian neighbors that their Indian religion and Indian customs were wrong. The Pilgrims displayed an intolerance toward the Indian religion similar to the intolerance displayed toward the less popular religions in Europe. The relationship deteriorated and within a few years the children of the people who ate together at the first Thanksgiving were killing one another in what came to be called King Phillip's War.

It is important to understand all of the story and not just the happy part. Today the town of Plymouth Rock has a Thanksgiving ceremony each year in remembrance of the first Thanksgiving. There are still Wampanoag people living in Massachusetts. In 1970, they asked one of them to speak at the ceremony to mark the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrim's arrival. Here is part of what was said:

"Today is a time of celebrating for you -- a time of looking back to the first days of white people in America. But it is not a time of celebrating for me. It is with a heavy heart that I look back upon what happened to my People. When the Pilgrims arrived, we, the Wampanoags, welcomed them with open arms, little knowing that it was the beginning of the end. That before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoag would no longer be a tribe. That we and other Indians living near the settlers would be killed by their guns or dead from diseases that we caught from them. Let us always remember, the Indian is and was just as human as the white people.

Although our way of life is almost gone, we, the Wampanoags, still walk the lands of Massachusetts. What has happened cannot be changed. But today we work toward a better America, a more Indian America where people and nature once again are important."

The Thanksgiving Meal

In 1621 the Plymouth colonists and the Wampanoag Indians shared an autumn harvest feast which is now known as the first Thanksgiving. While cooking methods and table etiquette have changed as the holiday has evolved, the meal is still consumed today with the same spirit of celebration and overindulgence.

Food

What foods topped the table at the first harvest feast? Historians aren't completely certain about the full bounty, but it's safe to say the pilgrims weren't gobbling up pumpkin pie or potatoes. Following is a list of the foods that were available to the colonists at the time of the 1621 feast.



SEAFOOD:	Cod, Eel, Clams, and Lobster
WILD FOWL:	Wild Turkey, Goose, Duck, Crane, Swan, Partridge, and Eagles
MEAT:	Venison, and Seal
GRAIN:	Wheat Flour, Indian Corn
VEGETABLES:	Pumpkin, Peas, Beans, Onions, Lettuce, Radishes, and Carrots
FRUIT:	Plums, and Grapes
NUTS:	Walnuts, Chestnuts, and Acorns
SEASONINGS:	Olive Oil, Liverwort, Leeks, Dried Currants, and Parsnips

Turkey

Governor William Bradford sent "four men fowling" after wild ducks and geese. "Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week". It is not certain that wild turkey was part of their feast. However, it is certain that they had venison. The term "turkey" was used by the Pilgrims to mean any sort of wild fowl.

Pumpkin Pie

It is unlikely that the first feast included that treat. The supply of flour had been long diminished, so there was no bread or pastries of any kind. However, they did eat boiled pumpkin, and they produced a type of fried bread from their corn crop.

Indian Corn

Corn was the main food and was eaten at every meal. There were many varieties of corn -- white, blue, yellow and red. Some of the corn was dried to preserve and keep it for food throughout the winter months. Dried corn could be made into a food called hominy. Corn was often ground into corn meal, using wooden mortars and pestles. The mortars were made of short logs which were turned upright and hollowed out on the top end. The corn was put in the hollow part and ground by pounding up and down with a long piece of wood which was rounded on both ends. This was called a pestle. Dessert was made by boiling corn meal with maple syrup.

All parts of the corn plant were used. Nothing was thrown away. The husks were braided and woven to make masks, moccasins, sleeping mats, baskets, and cornhusk dolls. Corncobs were used for fuel, to make darts for a game, and were tied onto a stick to make a rattle for ceremonies. Corn was unknown to the Europeans before they met the Indians. Indians gave them the seeds and taught them how to grow it. Today in the U.S.A., farm land is used to grow 60 million acres of corn.

There was also no milk, cider, potatoes, or butter. There was no domestic cattle for dairy products, and the newly-discovered potato was still considered by many Europeans to be poisonous. But the feast did include fish, berries, watercress, lobster, dried fruit, clams, venison, and plums.

Utensils

The pilgrims didn't use forks; they ate with spoons, knives, and their fingers. They wiped their hands on large cloth napkins, which they also used to pick up hot morsels of food. Salt would have been on the table. Pepper, however, was something that they used for cooking but wasn't available on the table.

Cooking

The pilgrims used many spices, like: cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, pepper, and dried fruit, in sauces for meats. In the seventeenth century, cooks did not use proportions (teaspoons, etc.), they just improvised. The best way to cook things in the seventeenth century was to roast them. Someone was assigned to sit for hours at a time and turn the spit to make sure the meat was evenly done. Since the pilgrims and Indians had no refrigeration in the seventeenth century, they tended to dry a lot of their foods to preserve them. They dried Indian corn, hams, fish, herbs.

Manners and Customs

In the seventeenth century, a person's social standing determined what he or she ate. The best food was placed next to the most important people. People didn't tend to sample everything that was on the table (as we do today), they just ate what was closest to them.

Serving in the seventeenth century was very different from serving today. People were not served their meals individually. Foods were served onto the table and then people took the food from the table and ate it. All the servers had to do was move the food from the place where it was cooked onto the table. Pilgrims didn't eat in courses as we do today. All of the different types of foods were placed on the table at the same time and people ate in any order they chose.

The biggest meal of the day for the colonists was eaten at noon and it was called noonmeat or dinner. The housewives would spend part of their morning cooking that meal. Supper was a smaller meal that they had at the end of the day. Breakfast tended to be leftovers from the previous day's noonmeat. In a pilgrim household, the adults sat down to eat and the children and servants waited on them. The Wampanoag Indians tended to eat when they were hungry and to have pots cooking throughout the day.

Buckles did not come into fashion until later in the seventeenth century and black and white were commonly worn only on Sunday and formal occasions. Women typically dressed in red, earthy green, brown, blue, violet, and gray, while men wore clothing in white, beige, black, earthy green, and brown.

George Washington's 1789 Thanksgiving Proclamation

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me to "recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:"

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day 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 all 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 the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been able 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 useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has 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 and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly 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 governments, 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, 3d day of October, A.D. 1789. *George Washington*

NOTE: After the Thanksgiving Proclamation was written, it was lost for 130 years. The original document was written in long hand by William Jackson, secretary to the President, and was then signed by George Washington. The original manuscript was not placed in the National Archives until 1921 when Dr. J. C. Fitzpatrick, assistant chief of the manuscripts division of the Library of Congress found the proclamation at an auction sale being held at an art gallery in New York. Dr Fitzpatrick purchased the document for 300.00 for the Library of Congress, in which it now resides. It was the first official presidential proclamation issued in the United States.

Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been trained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; 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 gifts 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, reverently 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 of 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 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, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

By the President: *Abraham Lincoln*

Secretary of State: *William H. Seward*,

"Thanksgiving is an invented tradition. It is based on the New England puritan Thanksgiving, which is a religious Thanksgiving, and the traditional harvest celebrations of England and New England and maybe other ideas like commemorating the pilgrims. All of these have been gathered together and transformed into something different from the original parts."

James W. Baker, Senior Historian at Plymouth Plantation

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Some Thanksgiving Web Page Links:

<http://www.halcyon.com/FWDP/cwiscat.html>

<http://www.historychannel.com/thanksgiving/>

<http://wilstar.com/holidays/thanksgv.htm>

URL: <http://www.night.net/thanksgiving/lesson-plan.html>

URL: <http://www.night.net/thanksgiving/first.html-ssi>