Thanksgiving: 1621, Plymouth, Massachusetts


Spelling in places has been left as written in article.

Though the Pilgrims held the first Thanksgiving dinner, our celebration of the holiday today is due in large part to the tireless efforts of a nineteenth-century female editor of a popular ladies’ magazine.

The 102 Pilgrims who sailed on board the Mayflower, fleeing religious oppression, were well acquainted with annual thanksgiving day celebrations. The custom was ancient and universal. The Greeks had honored Demeter, goddess of agriculture; the Romans had paid tribute to Ceres, the goddess of corn; while the Hebrews had offered thanks for abundant harvests with the eight-day Feast of Tabernacles. These customs had never really died out in the Western world.

The Pilgrims, after a four-month journey that began in Holland, landed at Plymouth on December 11, 1620. Confronted with severe weather, and a plague that killed hundreds of local Indians, they had by the fall of 1621 lost forty-six of their own members, mainly to scurvy and pneumonia. The survivors, though, had something to be thankful for. A new and bountiful crop had been harvested. Food was abundant. And they were alive, in large part thanks to the assistance of one person: an English-speaking Pawtuxet Indian named Squanto, who was to stay by their side until his death two years later.

In the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims elected a new governor, William Bradford, and proclaimed a day of thanksgiving in their small town, which had seven private homes and four communal buildings.

According to Governor Bradford’s own history, Of Plimoth Plantation, the celebration lasted three days. He sent “four men fowling,” and the ducks and geese they brought back were added to lobsters, clams, bass, corn, green vegetables, and dried fruit.

The Pilgrims invited the chief of the Wampanoag tribe, Massasoit, and ninety of his braves, and the work of preparing the feast—for ninety-one Indians and fifty-six settlers—fell to only four Pilgrim women and two teenage girls.

The first Thanksgiving Day had all the elements of modern celebrations, only on a smaller scale. A parade of soldiers, blasting muskets and trumpeting bugles, was staged by Captain Myles Standish, later to be immortalized in Longfellow’s “The Courtship of Miles Standish.” The ninety Indian braves competed against the settlers in foot races and jumping matches. And after the Indians displayed their accuracy with bow and arrow, the white men, with guns, exhibited their own breed of marksmanship.

Despite popular legend, two major staples of a modern Thanksgiving meal—turkey and pumpkin pie—may not have been enjoyed at the Pilgrims’ banquet.

Though Governor Bradford sent “four men fowling,” and they returned with a great store of wild Turkeys,” there is no proof that the catch included the bird we call a turkey. Wild turkeys did roam the woods of the Northeast, but in the language of the seventeenth-century Pilgrims, “turkey” simply meant any guinea fowl, that is, any bird with a featherless head, rounded body, and dark feathers speckled white.

More on the meal, page 3...

Thanksgiving Blessings
Folks around town have been asking about the BARN project. What is it and why and what other projects are in the works.

The Historical Society board of directors has been working on long-range plans for the entire museum complex including:
- Remodeling museum in 2010.
- Establishing the Heritage Trail on the property in 2015.
- Adding the Mineral King Room in 2016.
- Restoring the Bequette House in 2017.
- Planning to re-create the Bahwell Saloon in 2018, which was originally built in 1895.
- Developing a plan for a barn style structure that will have display space for antique wagons, farm equipment, event space and public restrooms. This is a large project that will take time and money. We have been working with various groups, both public and private to start construction in 2018-2019. No opening date has been set.
- Our building committee branch of the board of directors will be looking beyond the barn at other projects in the future with a master plan.

We believe that the development of the museum complex will be a center piece for the Three Rivers community; not just a museum of our past, but a place that locals and visitors alike can enjoy while learning about our history.

Our #1 goal is to preserve our history, while continuing to focus on the community and how we can contribute to the community.

**In Other News**

The Native-American Days event in mid September went well with about 463—4th grade students from schools in Tulare, Visalia, Woodlake and Three Rivers participating. As usual all instruction about Native-American life in our area was conducted by Native-Americans. We look forward next years event.

The Drive Thru Bar-B-Que we had in October was a success. Developed by the Three Rivers Volunteer Firefighters and hosted at the Museum. It was to be a 4 hour event for folks to just drive up, purchase their dinner and drive away. It only took the first two hours to go through our entire dinner supply.

Based on this success we are looking forward to continue the event and possibly add another with a different menu.

**Books and our Gift Shop**
- Did you know - that we sell more books than anything else in our gift shop and many of the books are written by local authors that live right here.
- Did you know - that most of our books along with many gift items are available in our ON-LINE store. Take a look: https://squareup.com/store/3rmuseum
- Did you know - that you can give the gift of history by purchasing a year’s membership in the Historical Society for that special person or history buff.
- Did you know - it’s tax deductible.
- Did you know - that with each new gift membership you purchase you receive a Historical Society Tote Bag.
- Did you know - I’m done talking.

**Veteran’s Day**

Join us for a day of celebration Saturday November 11, 2017 10am to 3pm

Local veterans will be telling stories of their time in the service. Whether their service was during peace time or combat, their stories are memorable.

11:00am
Tom Marshall
12:00noon
Bob & Mo Basham
1:00pm
TBA
2:00pm
Bill Haxton

**Refreshments**

**Holiday Gift Sale**

Our gift shop is packed with many gift ideas including books.

Stop by and take a look or go on line.

*A quick bit of humor from Marcelene Cox in Ladies Home Journal*

Woman to officer making road survey: "Don’t count us. We’ll be coming back in a few minutes when my husband admits he’s going in the wrong direction.”
It is certain, however, that the menu included venison, since another Pilgrim recorded that Chief Massasoit sent braves into the woods, who “killed five Deere which they brought to our Governum.” Watercress and leeks were on the table, along with bitter wild plums and dried berries, but there was no apple cider, and no milk, butter, or cheese, since cows had not been aboard the Mayflower.

And there was probably no pumpkin pie. Or bread as we’d recognize it. Stores of flour from the ship had long since been exhausted and years would pass before significant quantities of wheat were successfully cultivated in New England. Without flour for a pie crust, there could be no pie. But the Pilgrims did enjoy pumpkin at the meal—boiled.

The cooks concocted an ersatz bread. Boiling corn, which was plentiful, they kneaded it into round cakes and fried it in venison fat. There were fifteen young boys in the company, and during the three-day celebration they gathered wild cranberries, which the women boiled and mashed into a sauce for the meal’s meats.

The following year brought a poor harvest, and boatloads of new immigrants to house and feed; the Pilgrims staged no Thanksgiving feast. In fact, after that first plentiful and protracted meal, the Pilgrims never regularly celebrated a Thanksgiving Day.

A National Holiday. October 1777 marked the first time all the thirteen colonies joined in a common thanksgiving celebration, and the occasion commemorated the patriotic victory over the British at Saratoga. It, too, however, was a one-time affair.

The first national Thanksgiving proclamation was issued by President George Washington in 1789, the year of his inauguration, but discord among the colonies prevented the executive order from being carried out. For one thing, many Americans felt that the hardships endured by a mere handful of early settlers were unworthy of commemoration on a national scale—certainly the brave new nation had nobler events that merited celebration. On this theme, President Thomas Jefferson went so far as to actively condemn a national recognition of Thanksgiving during his two terms.

The establishment of the day we now celebrate nationwide was largely the result of the diligent efforts of magazine editor Sarah Josepha Hale. Mrs. Hale started her one-woman crusade for the celebration in 1827 and finally, national events converged to make Mrs. Hale’s request a reality. By 1863, the Civil War had bitterly divided the nation into two armed camps. Mrs. Hale’s final editorial, highly emotional and unflinchingly patriotic, appeared in September of that year, just weeks after the Battle of Gettysburg. In spite of the staggering toll of dead, Gettysburg was an important victory for the North, and a general feeling of elation, together with the clamor produced by Mrs. Hale’s widely circulated editorial, prompted President Abraham Lincoln to issue a proclamation on October 3, 1863, setting aside the last Thursday in November as a national Thanksgiving Day.

Since then, there has been one controversial tampering with that tradition. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt shifted Thanksgiving back one week, to the third Thursday in November—because store merchants requested an increase in the number of shopping days between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

This pleased the merchants but just about no one else. Protests were staged throughout the country. Millions of Americans, in defiance of the proclamation, continued to celebrate on the last Thursday in November—and they took the day off from work. Not wanting to go down in history as the Grinch who stole Thanksgiving, in the spring of 1941 Roosevelt publicly admitted he had made an error in judgment and returned the holiday to the last Thursday in November.

The merchants countered by offering sales and discounts, thus beginning the annual practice of promoting Christmas earlier and earlier.
Established - December 1991
Museum Opened - October 2000
501(c)3 Non-Profit Organization

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2017 EVENTS

Gift Shop Holiday Sale
November 4—December 24, 9am to 3pm
Shop in our Museum or on line at www.3rmuseum.org
and don’t forget those Museum memberships for the family.

LIVING HISTORY DAY
November 11, 10am-3pm, Veteran’s Day Celebration,
honoring military
At The Museum

FESTIVAL OF TREES
November 16, doors open at 5pm, $25.00 per person
St. Anthony’s Retreat, Three Rivers

COMMUNITY CAROLING
December 2, 5pm-7pm
At The Museum

2018 EVENTS

CHOCOLATE & WINE FESTIVAL
February 10
at the Museum

CALL FOR DETAILS
559-561-2707