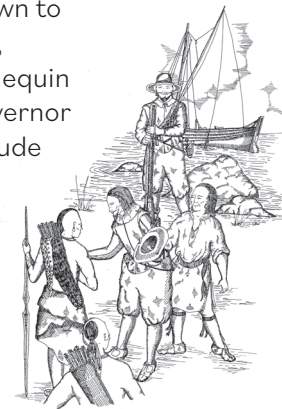


THE EVOLUTION OF THANKSGIVING: BORN IN *New England*, FROM A SPIRIT OF *gratitude*

1621

March 22, 1621: For the third time, the newly-established Plymouth Colony receives Ousamequin's emissary, Samoset. This time, he is accompanied by a translator, Tisquantum, who had been kidnapped from Patuxet almost a decade before. They announce the arrival of the Pokanoket leader, Ousamequin, known to history by his title, Massasoit. Ousamequin and Plymouth Governor John Carver conclude an alliance.



September 13, Anno Dom. 1621.
 Know all men by these presents, That we, whose names are under written, do acknowledge ourselves to be the loyal subjects of King James, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c. In Witness whereof, and as a testimonial of the same, we have subscribed our names or marks, as followeth:

Ohquamehud,	Nattawahunt,	Quadaquina,
Cawnacome,	Caunbatant,	Huttamoiden,
Obbatinnua,	Chilkatabuk,	Apannow.

The September 13 meeting as described in Nathaniel Morton's *New-Englands Memoriall*, first published in 1669. Page from the 1826 edition. Collection of Plimoth Patuxet Museums.

September 13, 1621:

In continuing to reaffirm the peace, several Indigenous sachems, including Ousamequin's brother, Quadaquina, Epenow from Capawack (Martha's Vineyard), Conbitant of Mattapoisset, and Chickataubut of Neponset, "came unto the government of New Plymouth" and signed a document declaring themselves subjects of King James of England.

October 12, 1637: Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Connecticut colonies, and Scituate—a single town in Plymouth Colony—declare a day of thanksgiving following the end of the Pequot War. Plymouth Colony as a whole did not participate in the Pequot War and did not declare a day of thanksgiving.

1789: George Washington proclaims a day of thanksgiving. This is repeated again in 1795. That year, Concord, Massachusetts minister Ezra Ripley shares a sermon in which he notes the presence of the annual New England thanksgiving.



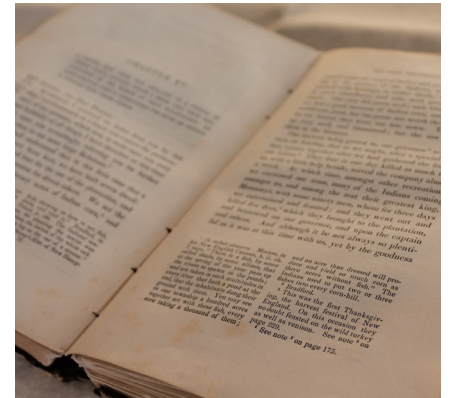
1777: Continental Congress declares the first "American" thanksgiving following the victory at Saratoga during the American Revolution. Though it doesn't connect to the tradition of family gatherings and doesn't involve feasting or recreation, the proclamation does tie a national moment to New England Puritan holy day roots. This type of Thanksgiving is proclaimed annually in December from 1777-1783 (except in 1782, when it is in November).



1798 & 1799: John Adams declares days of thanksgiving.

1815: James Madison declares two days of Thanksgiving, neither of which are in the fall. Though the tradition continues in New England, no further national thanksgivings are declared until after the Civil War.

1841: Alexander Young publishes *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers* in which he connects the description of the 1621 harvest feast to the New England Thanksgiving tradition. (See page 4.) As New Englanders move westward during the 19th century they bring their traditions with them, connecting the 1621 event to the emerging national holiday.



July 2, 1621: Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins journey to Sowams, the seat of Ousamequin, to reaffirm the peace between Plymouth and Pokanoket.

Fall 1621: The First Thanksgiving.

Following the Pilgrims' first successful harvest in New England, and a season of diplomacy, the colonists and their Indigenous neighbors participate in a three-day event filled with food, games, military demonstrations, and diplomacy. Ousamequin and at least 90 Native men joined the approximately fifty English colonists in Plymouth. This event becomes the inspiration for regular harvest celebrations in New England and later in the early American republic.



Late July/Early August 1621: The peace is tested when John Billington Jr. is lost in the woods outside of Plymouth. Coming across the Indigenous community south of Plymouth at Manomet, he is "conveyed further off" onto Cape Cod to Nauset. Eventually, through intelligence from Ousamequin and the diplomacy of an English delegation, Billington is returned by Aspinet, the sachem at Nauset, but the incident illustrates the differing priorities of the region's diverse Indigenous communities.

1623

July 1623: A day of thanksgiving (religious day of prayer) is proclaimed in Plymouth after providential rain saves crops from a drought.

1637

1676

1676: The New England colonies declare a day of thanksgiving (religious day of prayer) to mark their victory in King Philip's War.

1777

1788

1788: In June, the United States Constitution is ratified. That fall, Thanksgiving advocate Sarah Josepha Hale is born in New Hampshire. In November, in one of the first surviving written descriptions of a New England Thanksgiving holiday, Mason Cogswell describes traveling home to Connecticut to spend time with family, enjoy a feast and attend a Thanksgiving Day church service.

1789

1798

1799

1815

1827



Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879). Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

1827: Sarah Josepha Hale's *Northwood: A Tale of New England* vividly describes the traditional New England Thanksgiving holiday dinner. This is the first description of its kind to appear in print.

1841

1844

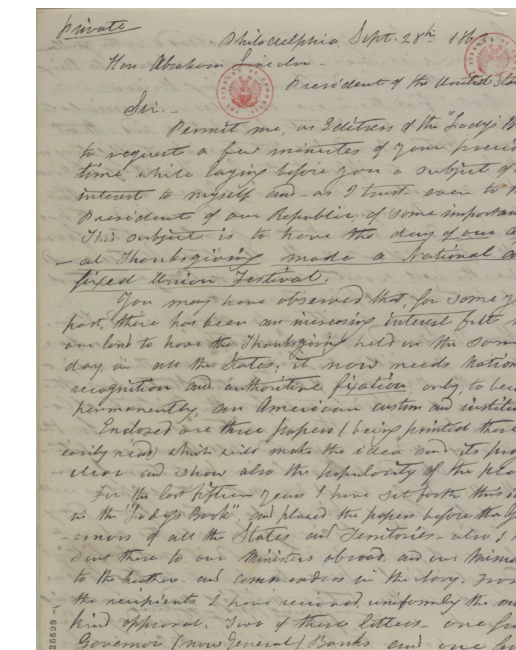
1844: When Iowa proclaims its first territorial Thanksgiving, an Iowa City newspaper welcomes "the good old Pilgrim holiday to our midst."

1847

1847-1863: Sarah Josepha Hale publishes an annual editorial in *Godey's Lady's Book* advocating for the establishment of Thanksgiving as a national holiday.

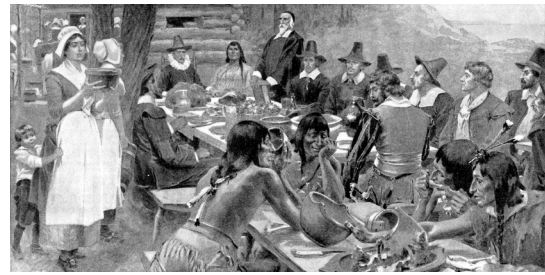
“With sentiments and emotions peculiarly respectful and pleasing, therefore, we meet and welcome this day, this anniversary *thanksgiving*, which we are called to celebrate in conformity to the religious *custom* of our pious ancestors. They early established this religious *festival*; they maintained it with pious care; and we, their descendants, *gratefully* receive and *joyfully* imitate their laudable example.”

EZRA RIPLEY, NOVEMBER 19, 1795



Letter from Sarah Josepha Hale petitioning President Abraham Lincoln to proclaim a national day of Thanksgiving in 1863. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Abraham Lincoln Papers.





Courtesy of James W. Baker.

1894: On November 29, just two years after receiving its first immigrants to the United States, Ellis Island hosts 350 new arrivals for a Thanksgiving dinner that includes, according to *The New York Times*, turkey, vegetables, pies and puddings. In the ensuing years, observance of the holiday would become popular in schools and homes as a way to Americanize new immigrants.

1889: Jane G. Austin's *Standish of Standish* provides a fictionalized account of the First Thanksgiving, portraying it as an outdoor event. Austin's dramatic retelling influences W.L. Taylor's illustration *The First Thanksgiving Dinner, with Portraits of the Pilgrim Fathers* (1897, above) and countless other literary and graphic representations over the next century.

1861-1863: The Confederacy (1861 & 1862) and Union (1862 & 1863) observe thanksgivings following victories in the Civil War.

1876: Princeton and Yale Universities meet in the first annual college football Thanksgiving Day game.

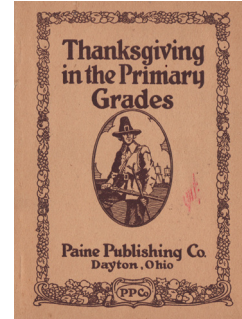
1863: Abraham Lincoln declares the first of the modern series of annual Thanksgivings. Unlike proclamations for days of Thanksgiving earlier in the war, he calls for giving thanks for "general causes" rather than "special providences." The 1863 proclamation establishes a pattern of the holiday being held on the last Thursday of November every year from 1864-1939 (except in 1865 and 1869).

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-DIG-pga-03412].



Their first Thanksgiving dinner. The artist portrays an immigrant family eating together at Castle Garden in New York City, the forerunner to Ellis Island. From *Harper's Weekly* 29 Nov. 1884. Library of Congress.

1882: Louisa May Alcott publishes "An Old Fashioned Thanksgiving Story," referencing a traditional New England Thanksgiving that happened "sixty years ago, up among the New Hampshire hills," in which a family of siblings attempt an endearing feast without the assistance of their parents, who are called away to a sick relative.



Books were used to teach Thanksgiving lessons to children in the early 20th century. Pictured: Mayme R. Bitney's *Thanksgiving in the Primary Grades* (1924) and Corinne B. Jones et al., *Thanksgiving in the Schoolroom* (1937). Courtesy of James W. Baker.

The first house built by Plimoth Patuxet Museums opened on the Plymouth waterfront in 1948. Collection of Plimoth Patuxet Museums.



1924: Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade debuts in New York City. Four years later, the department store introduces their now iconic balloons.

In the early 20th century, schoolchildren often experienced the story of Thanksgiving through annual costumed pageants. November 27, 1911. Library of Congress.



1947: Plimoth Patuxet Museums (then Plimoth Plantation) is founded and becomes the defacto museum of Thanksgiving.



Dr. Mordica Johnson, president of Howard University, serving portions of Thanksgiving turkey to members of his family, Washington, DC, 1942. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, [LC-USW3-012031-C].

1920: Gimbel Brothers Department Store in Philadelphia (below) hosts the first department store-sponsored Thanksgiving Day parade. It features the arrival of Santa Clause.



Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company Collection.

Saying grace before carving the turkey at Thanksgiving dinner in the home of Earle Landis, Neffsville, Pennsylvania, 1942. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, [LC-USW3-011874-D].



1941: Law passed by Congress establishes the fourth Thursday of November as the national Thanksgiving holiday.

1939: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declares the next to last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving to extend the Christmas shopping season. States are divided in their recognition, with critics declaring the national holiday "Franksgiving." Twenty-three states have Thanksgiving on November 23 and twenty-three on November 30, while Texas and Colorado have two Thanksgivings.

1970: Reflecting the centrality of Thanksgiving to American life, groups begin to use the holiday to comment on the American experiment. An annual National Day of Mourning tradition begins in Plymouth, Massachusetts when Frank (Wamsutta) James is prevented by the event organizers from giving a speech calling attention to the detrimental effects of five centuries of colonization at the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims' landing.



America's Hometown Thanksgiving Parade in 2019. Image courtesy WCVB Channel 5.

"But let me assure you, and this fine tom *turkey*, that he will not end up on anyone's dinner table, not this guy—he's granted a Presidential *pardon* as of right now—and allow him to live out his days on a children's farm not far from here."

PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH, 1989

1989: The Presidential turkey pardon becomes an annual tradition during the George H.W. Bush administration.



Although the turkey pardon didn't become an annual tradition until 1989, presidents often received turkey deliveries from across the country. Here, a Thanksgiving turkey arrives for President Harding in 1921 or 1922. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Harris & Ewing, [LC-DIG-hec-41669].

1996: The Town of Plymouth, Massachusetts starts an annual Thanksgiving parade held the Saturday before the holiday.

October 1991: "Whereas the month of November is the traditional harvest season of the American Indians and is generally a time of celebration and giving thanks," Congress passes a joint resolution requesting that the President "proclaim...each November thereafter, as 'American Indian Heritage Month.'"



Thanksgiving meal at Plimoth Patuxet Museums.

2021: The 400th anniversary of the First Thanksgiving is commemorated.



2012: The 92nd Street Y and the United Nations Foundation harness the collective attention of Thanksgiving and the shopping days following it to create #GivingTuesday to encourage charitable giving.