

1863, the last Thursday in November, a Day of Thanksgiving:

"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... I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, 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...[it is] announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord...It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people."

On October 3, 1863, Lincoln's proclamation passed by an Act of Congress. That proclamation was repeated by every subsequent president until 1939, when Franklin D. Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving Day up one week earlier than had been tradition, to appease merchants who wanted more time to feed the growing pre-Christmas consumer frenzy. Folding to Congressional pressure two years later however, Roosevelt signed a resolution returning Thanksgiving to the last Thursday of November.

Roosevelt's inclination to manipulate Thanksgiving for commercial interests, foretold much of the secular nature of "thanksgiving" to come. But, amid all the oppression of secular materialism in advance of that day in December when we give thanks for the birth of Christ, oppression vastly different but somehow remarkably similar to that of our Pilgrim forefathers, we are still at our core, a nation eternally thankful to God.

On this Day of Thanksgiving, may God rest your heart and mind, may He bless and keep you and your family, and may He extend His blessing upon our great nation, guiding us one and all by His calling. Amid the haste, we remember His words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger

and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3-10) — Source: The Federalist - 1998

Noteworthy Quote:

"Remember ever, and always, that your country was founded, not by the 'most superficial, the lightest, the most irreflective of all European races,' but by the stern old Puritans who made the deck of the Mayflower an altar of the living God, and whose first act on touching the soil of the new world was to offer on bended knees thanksgiving to Almighty God."

SOURCE: Former U.S. Senator Henry Wilson (1855-72), and Vice-President under Ulysses S. Grant (1873-75), America's God and Country, William J. Federer, 1994.

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THE HISTORY OF THANKSGIVING

The first day of thanks in America was celebrated in Virginia at Cape Henry in 1607, but it was the Pilgrims' three-day feast celebrated in early November of 1621, which we now popularly regard as the "First Thanksgiving." The first real Thanksgiving to God in the Plymouth Colony was actually celebrated during the summer of 1623 when the colonists declared a Thanksgiving holiday after their crops were saved by much needed rainfall. The Pilgrims left Plymouth, England on September 6, 1620. They sailed for a new world with the promise of both civil and religious liberty. For almost three months, 102 seafarers braved harsh elements to arrive off the coast of what is now Massachusetts, in late November of 1620. On December 11, prior to disembarking at Plymouth Rock, they signed the "Mayflower Compact," America's original document of civil government and the first to introduce self-government.

Most of what we know about the Pilgrim Thanksgiving of 1621 comes from original accounts of the young colony's leaders, Governor William Bradford and Master Edward Winslow, in their own hand:

"They begane now to gather in ye small harvest they had, and to fitte up their houses and dwellings against winter, being well recovered in health & strength, and had all things in good plenty; for some were thus imployed in affairs abroad, others were excersised in fishing, aboute codd, & bass, & other fish, of which yey tooke good store, of which every family had their portion. All ye somer ther was no wante. And now begane to come in store of foule, as winter aproached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degree). And besids water foule, ther was great store of wild Turkie, of which they took many, besids venison, &c. Besids they had aboute a peck a meale a weeke to a person, or now since harvest, Indean corne to yt proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty hear to their freinds in

England, which were not fained, but true reports."
-W.B. (William Bradford)

"Our Corne did proue well, & God be prayed, we had a good increase of Indian Corne, and our Barly indifferent good, but our Pease not worth the gathering, for we feared they were too late sowne, they came vp very well, and blossomed, but the Sunne parched them in the blossome; our harvest being gotten in, our Governour sent foure men on fowling, that so we might after a more speciall manner reioyce together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labors; they foure in one day killed as much fowle, as with a little helpe beside, served the Company almost a weeke, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Armes, many of the Indians coming amongst vs, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some nintie men, whom for three dayes we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed fiue Deere, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed upon our Governour, and upon the Captaine, and others. And although it be not alwayes so plentifull, as it was at this time with vs, yet by the goodneses of God, we are so farre from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

-E.W. (Edward Winslow) Plymouth, in New England, his 11th of December, 1621.

The feast included foods suitable for a head table of honored guests, such as the chief men of the colony and Native leaders Massasoit ("Great Leader" also known as Ousamequin "Yellow Feather"), the sachem (chief) of Pokanoket (Pokanoket is the area at the head of Narragansett Bay). Venison, wild fowl, turkeys and Indian corn were the staples of the meal. It likely included other food items known to have been aboard the Mayflower or available in Plymouth such as spices, Dutch cheese, wild grapes, lobster, cod, native melons, pumpkin (pompion) and rabbit."

By the mid-17th century the custom of autumnal Thanksgivings was established throughout New England. One hundred and eighty years after the first day of Thanksgiving, the Founding Fathers thought it important that this tradition be recognized by proclamation. Soon after approving the Bill of

Rights, a motion in Congress to initiate the proclamation of a national day of Thanksgiving was approved.

Mr. [Elias] Boudinot (who was the President of Congress during the American Revolution) said he could not think of letting the congressional session pass over without offering an opportunity to all the citizens of the United States of joining with one voice in returning to Almighty God their sincere thanks for the many blessings He had poured down upon them. With this view, therefore, he would propose the following resolution:

"Resolved, that a joint committee of both Houses be directed to wait upon the President of the United States to request that he would 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 signal favors of Almighty God..."

"Mr. [Roger] Sherman (a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution) justified the practice of thanksgiving on any signal event not only as a laudable one in itself, but as warranted by a number of precedents in Holy Writ...This example he thought worthy of a Christian imitation on the present occasion; and he would agree with the gentleman who moved the resolution...The question was put on the resolution and it was carried in the affirmative."

This resolution was delivered to President George Washington who readily agreed with its suggestion and put forth the following proclamation by his signature:

"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 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 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 supplication 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, The 3rd day of October, AD 1789. — George Washington

After 1815, prophetically, there were no further annual proclamations of Thanksgiving until the Civil War when Abraham Lincoln declared November 26,