

Thanksgiving rich in history, tradition

I hope you and your family are enjoying the Thanksgiving Day weekend. Yesterday, our local stores and area malls filled with shoppers preparing for the upcoming Christmas holiday season. However, before we quickly focus on the next big holiday, it is important to remember the day we celebrated on Thursday. The Thanksgiving holiday helps to remind us to be thankful for the gifts of family, friends, health and home.

When conjuring images of the first Thanksgiving, many imagine a long table adorned with a magnificent feast of mashed potatoes, corn, cranberries, stuffing, pumpkin pie and a large turkey. At the table, Pilgrims in black and white dress with buckled shoes and long, white stockings invite a few Native American Indians to the table for a bonding between cultures. Yet, this vision of our Thanksgiving tradition is not wholly accurate.

In 1621, the original Thanksgiving dinner is described in a firsthand account by colony leader Edward Winslow: "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 ... we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us ... with some 90 men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, ... by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

A "Thanksgiving" to the early Pilgrims was a very religious holiday involving the church ordered to praise God for a specific event. The original 1621 feast included dancing, game playing and secular singing, which, oddly enough, demonstrates that the Pilgrims would not have called the feast a "Thanksgiving." The first feast took place some time between Sept. 21 and Nov. 11, based on the English Harvest festivals, not on the fourth November Thursday.

The first accounts describe a three-day feast after the harvest, including hundreds of Pilgrims and almost a hundred Wampanoag Indians. Because of these numbers, the feast was held outside at probably numerous smaller tables. The Pilgrims normally didn't eat many vegetables, usually loading up on meats. The historical references show us that food was plentiful and included geese, ducks, turkeys, and even swans. The meal was, like our current tradition, served during the middle of the day.

In addition, Pilgrims dressed differently than many people envision. Buckles didn't become fash-



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ionable until later that century, and their black and white dress was only worn on Sundays. Women mostly dressed in earthy tones, while men wore white, beige, or brown dressings. These cultural differences create a different vision of this first Thanksgiving feast. Interesting enough, this harvest feast was not an annual event.

The foundation of our current tradition didn't form until decades after the 1621 dinner. The celebration gradually became annual in the New England area because of great harvesting yields. But, it wasn't until the Continental Congress suggested a yearly day of national Thanksgiving during the American Revolution that the holiday became a standard practice.

In 1817, New York adopted an annual Thanksgiving Day custom, as did many other states, over the next 50 years. The practice became nationalized in 1863 after President Lincoln declared the holiday to be the last Thursday in November. This however, was altered by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1939 because twice every seven years, November has five Thursdays. Now, following Roosevelt's lead, we all now celebrate Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday in November.

Our current Thanksgiving holiday tradition represents many things to many different people. Some associate big family dinners as the custom; some volunteer to serve food at homeless shelters; some cuddle up with close family in front of the television to watch Santa Clause wrap up the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The Pilgrims were thankful for a harvest that could sustain their colonies, being forever grateful to the Greater God that watches over us in the same manner today.

This holiday season, I am thankful for our great country, our great state and our great community in which to raise a family. I am supremely thankful for my family and friends, and the shelter and clothing that keep us safe and warm; ultimately the work of our Creator, which blesses us each in many ways. I wish everyone in our community a Happy Thanksgiving weekend, and if you travel, I wish you safe returns.

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