

Presidential turkey pardon has become an annual tradition

Custom began with Lincoln in 1863

BY TOM EMERY
For the Sentinel

Each year just before Thanksgiving, the President ceremoniously pardons a turkey, a light-hearted moment in his otherwise grueling schedule. The tradition is traced to Abraham Lincoln, who wrote a pardon at the behest of his youngest son, Tad, in 1863.

Though the origin is debated, many researchers believe that Lincoln was the first to bestow a Presidential pardon on a turkey, thus saving it from the dinner table. The reprieve, though, was actually issued at Christmas.

In late 1863, the Lincolns received a turkey as a gift, and though the bird was intended for Christmas dinner, nine-year-old Tad, an animal lover, had other ideas. He made a pet of the bird, which he named Jack, and taught the bird to follow him around the White House grounds.

On Christmas Eve, the President tried to tell his son that the bird would become the family dinner. Upset, Tad reportedly cried, "I can't help it. He's a good turkey, and I don't want him killed." Lincoln gave in and wrote out a pardon on a card, which he handed to his son to appease him.

"Tad was begging for the turkey's life," said Dr. Wayne Temple, an accomplished Lin-

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coln scholar and Deputy Director of the Illinois State Archives in Springfield. "Lincoln was always looking for something to amuse the children, so he pardoned the turkey."

The President's playfulness reflected other episodes with his children. In 1861, he had written a pardon for a soldier doll, also named Jack, that Tad and older brother Willie (who died the next February) had sentenced to death.

In 1997, Bill Clinton referenced Lincoln's story in ceremonies to pardon a 60-pounder named Willis. George W. Bush also made reference to Lincoln's pardon in 2001.

"Lincoln is probably the only President with the sense of humor to pardon a turkey," laughed Temple. "Other Presidents have been more serious-minded, but that's how Lincoln could be."

Some of Lincoln's successors have shown less inclination. After President Obama's first turkey pardon in 2009, a com-

mentator found that the chief executive "did not seem all that thrilled with his role." Seven years before, when a female turkey – a 30-pound gobbler named Katie – was pardoned for the first time, G. W. Bush absentmindedly twice called the bird "he."

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His successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, ate each of the birds given to him during his eight years in office. Four days before his assassination in 1963, John F. Kennedy offhandedly said of a 55-pound gift turkey, "we'll let this one grow."

The first President on record to deliver a pardon was Ronald

Reagan in 1987, allegedly to draw attention from reporters' questions on the Iran-Contra affair. No turkeys were spared the following year, but in 1989, Reagan's successor, George H.W. Bush, instituted the pardon as an annual rite.

Two turkeys are normally chosen for the ceremony, one serving as an alternate, to stand in if the first bird cannot fulfill the duties. In 2008, Bush pardoned the backup, Pumpkin, after the top turkey, Pecan, came down sick the night before the ceremony.

In recent years, reprieved turkeys have been sent to various locations in Virginia, including George Washington's estate at Mount Vernon and a place in Fairfax County called Frying Pan Park. From 2005-09, the turkeys were flown first-class to Disneyland to serve as grand marshals of Disney's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Today, the annual ceremony to pardon the turkey usually lasts a few minutes and provides a prime photo opportunity for the President and members of his family. The White House frequently invites children to join the ceremony, adding to the holiday festivities.

Tom Emery is a freelance writer and historical researcher from Carlinville, Ill. He may be reached at 217-710-8392 or il-civilwar@yahoo.com.

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What I'm thankful for...cont.

get to practice sports with him. I am hopeful we have world peace. I am thankful for teachers because they help us learn. I am happy we have beautiful days. Thanks to all my family love you all.

Araya Doolittle

I am thankful for my loving parents that are nice to me and try to make me happy. I try to be thankful for all of the happiness that happens in my life. I am happy for the people that are nice to me and changed my life. I am happy. I am glad that all of my teachers taught me many things. I am thankful for all these things because all of these nice people taught me something, made me happy or helped me I am happy for my friends that play with me and make me happy. I am thankful for all of these things so I am happy.

Michael Dickinson

I am thankful for my mom and dad because they work hard for me and my sister and brother. My dad works hard for money for my mom, so that she can buy things that we need like food, clothes and shoes. And my dad is working so he can save money to go back to Mexico to live there. I am thankful for my uncle because he helped me with multiplication chart for 4th grade and 5th grade. And he helps me with math and reading in English and Spanish. I am thankful for cousin because he gave me money for the jog o thon. I am thankful for the army because they fought for us and saved us. I am thankful for my dad because he bought my house and buying for me and my brother and sister for going to school. I am thankful for all the teachers and for Lucig because they all taught me a lot of math, science and reading. Thank you teachers!

Jose Menchaca

I am thankful for parents because they take care of me, for putting a roof on my head and for giving them jobs to pay for my sister's college and to feed us. I am also thankful for my family to care for us. I'm thankful for the army to fight our world wars. I'm

also thankful for the teacher for teaching us to read, write, and for teaching math. I'm thankful for the roof's on the houses. I'm thankful for my pets to play with. I'm also thankful for my friends to play and hang out with. I'm also thankful for peace. I'm thankful for the floors and walls for keeping us warm and have ground to step on when we walk. I'm sorry if I haven't said thank you. But I am thankful for everything I have and for the things that are in the world to help kids to learn like me. That's what am thankful.

Ashley Pleitez

I am thankful for my family each one of them. My brother Emry he is fun to hang out with and talk to also I love him. My sister Kara she is caring she talks to me when I'm sad and plays with me sometimes. Also there is my step mom she cares for me she loves me. And my other sister Elyssa she plays with me and we hang out with each other. Y dad cheers me up when I'm sad he does what he can to help us and I love him. Last but not least my brother Cody he plays with me he cheers me up when I'm sad but I don't listen I should though. I just get sad or mad and don't listen. That's all I'm thankful for.

Eihan McMurray

I am thankful for Cottage Grove and that it's a city. I'm also thankful that I have friends so that I'm not bored. I'm thankful that I have family or I would have nobody to teach me anything. I would have no way to get food. I'm thankful that I have a snug bed to sleep in. I'm thankful that I have presence in the world. I'm thankful that I'm outfitted with some clothes. I'm thankful that I'm writing this paper.

Tristan Bentley

I am thankful for my dad because he works at the post office. He makes money to have a house and a car.

Zachary

I am thankful for my family because my dad exercises and he helps me ride my bike farther. My mom supports a roof

over my head. I have the best grandmas in the world because one got me a bike the other got me an apartment for me and my dad. I thank my great aunt because she got my previous bike. I also thank my great great uncle because he taught me to be who I am and to live my life the way I want to.

Sophia Chappelle

I am thankful for my family because they make me laugh and they work hard to get me clothes and shoes for me and my brother. My family cares for me when I'm gone. Some kids don't have a family that buy them clothes or shoes and don't care for them so I'm lucky that I have a family that care for me and my brother.

Angelina Rigole

I am thankful for Bohemia because it is a very nice place to learn. Some people I am thankful for are my mom, dad, and little brother. Because my mom and dad work so hard to keep me and my brother safe, healthy, and happy. I am thankful for my little brother because he does so much for me like he stands up for me, and when I am sad he is there to comfort me. I am thankful for my grandma because she is always there when I need her.

Gigi Valley

I am thankful for having a MARVOLOUS family. They help me learn new things. I'm thankful that they can afford to buy me clothes and that we have a nice home. I'm thankful for my teachers that taught me how to read, do math, science, etc. I am thankful that my sister Abril, taught me how to be a good role model. I am thankful that I am alive and that I can smell, feel, see, talk, and that I have doctors that will help me hear better. I am thankful to be ME!

Helen Leal-Coronel

I am thankful for my family because they make me laugh, cheer me up when I cry, and show that they care. My parents are also very nice and they are the reason I have food, clothes and a house. They work very hard for my brother and I. I also am happy I have

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