

Celebrating Thanksgiving through the centuries



By Annalynn Black

Thanksgiving is a holiday deeply rooted in American culture, symbolizing gratitude, family, and feasting. The origins of Thanksgiving date back to 1621 when Pilgrims, early settlers of the Plymouth Colony in present-day Massachusetts, held a harvest feast after a successful growing season. This event is regarded as America's "first Thanksgiving," although celebrations of thanks have ancient origins, with many cultures holding festivals to celebrate the harvest and give thanks for a successful bounty.

The Plymouth settlers, or Pilgrims, were English Puritan separatists who sought religious freedom in the New World. Their first winter in America had been harsh, leading to the loss of many lives. According to the writings of Pilgrim Edward Winslow, in 1621, after their first successful corn harvest, Governor William Bradford organized a celebratory feast and invited the local Wampanoag

tribe to join. This event, which lasted three days, is widely regarded as the first Thanksgiving. The gathering included the Pilgrims and about ninety Indians, including King Massasoit of the Wampanoag tribe. The feast likely featured dishes utilizing native ingredients such as venison, various seafood, and indigenous vegetables. The following spring, the surviving Pilgrims forged an alliance with the Wampanoag tribe, which taught them crucial survival skills and helped them adapt to the new environment.

The tradition of a harvest celebration did not become an annual event immediately. Thanks were given at different times of the year, often in a religious context, and celebrations varied from one colony to another. It wasn't until the late 1660s that the practice became more uniform, sometimes called "public days of thanksgiving," recommended by colonial leaders after particularly bountiful harvests or other

good fortunes.

Life for the Pilgrims was challenging, marked by laborious farm work and the negotiation of relations with neighboring Native American tribes. Their daily life centered around survival, and religious observance played a significant role. The concept of setting aside time to give thanks to divine providence was rooted deeply in their religious beliefs.

In the midst of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863, marking it on the last Thursday of November. Lincoln's decision is intended to lift the nation's spirits and foster a sense of unity. He called it a day to express gratitude "for our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens." This pronouncement followed years of campaigning by Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of "Godey's Lady's Book", who passionately believed a National Day of Thanks would unify the country.

During this era, America saw more formal Thanksgiving celebrations. The industrial revolution meant that fewer Americans lived and worked on farms, and the holiday shifted to reflect a more urban lifestyle. The meal continued to be central to the celebration, but with new innovations and food availability, the menu could include a variety of dishes, green bean casserole and pumpkin pie for example. The tradition of "pardoning" a turkey started later but symbolizes the humanitarian sentiment of the times.

The date of Thanksgiving remained flexible until President Franklin D. Roosevelt set it during the Great Depression to boost retail sales. With Roosevelt's encouragement, in 1941 Congress officially designated the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day, where it continues to stand today. He had tried to extend the Christmas shopping season by moving Thanksgiving up a week, an unpopular attempt that was derisively termed "Franksgiving" according to History.com.

The holiday has evolved significantly over time in the United States. Initially connected primarily with religion and the harvest, it's now largely secular and focuses on family and culinary traditions. The menu usually features turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, various side dishes, and pumpkin pie - foods that are somewhat traditional but can also reflect the personal tastes and cultural backgrounds of the cooks.

In recent decades,

Thanksgiving has continued to evolve yet remains fundamentally a day for gratitude and spending time with family. Modern celebrations often extend beyond the family-centric model to include "Friends-giving," a version of the holiday observed with friends.

Parades have also become an integral part of the holiday in cities and towns across the United States. The most famous of these, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City, began in 1924 and attracts millions of viewers, both in person and on television. Football has also become a staple of Thanksgiving celebrations, with games played at both professional and amateur levels.

Furthermore, the holiday has been criticized and led to an increase in awareness and activism on behalf of Native American groups who remember the holiday as a painful reminder of colonization's devastating effects on indigenous peoples. Many Americans celebrate the day as a time of reflection and awareness as well as family gatherings and thankfulness.

This enduring holiday indeed showcases the adaptive and inclusive nature of American culture through the diverse ways it has been celebrated over the centuries. As we look to future Thanksgivings, it will undoubtedly continue to evolve, incorporating new traditions while honoring its historical roots.

Correction

From the story last week. Joann Dickson is the pastor of the Hopeful Saints Episcopal/Lutheran Ministry in Heppner.

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Morrow County taking applications for the WDAC

Morrow County is seeking applications from individuals interested in serving on the Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee, an advisory committee to the Board of Commissioners. The Committee consists of seven members: two Wolf Conservation representatives, two Livestock Producer representatives, two Local Business representatives, and one County Commissioner. The current vacancies are for a Wolf Conservation representative, a Livestock Producer representative and a Local Business representative. Letters of interest must be received by Friday, December 6. Please submit letters to Valerie Ballard, vballard@morrowcountyor.gov or by regular mail, Morrow County Board of Commissioners, P.O. Box 788, Heppner, OR 97836. The purpose of the Committee is the administration of the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Wolf Compensation and Financial Assistance Grant Program. The Committee meets to: discuss ways to assist livestock producers with non-lethal deterrent methods; determine the dollar amounts to be reimbursed to implement those deterrent methods; and compensation amounts in the event of a proven wolf depredation. Term lengths are four years. The Committee meets every other month in Heppner, except May-August, or on an as-needed basis.

The Wolf Depredation Advisory Committee is still accepting applications from

livestock producers to assist with expenses incurred due to wolf activity until Friday, December 4. Appli-

cations are available online at <https://www.co.morrow.or.us/bc-wdac> or at the Bartholomew Building. For

additional information or questions, contact Committee Chair, Dean Robinson, 541-980-2350.

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