



By Gina Pierce

My holiday research for Thanksgiving led me to a wonderful web site that I was amazed to find. The address was www.thanksgiving.org and it will take you to Thanks-Giving Square. The below information is all courtesy of their wonderful web-site and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Did you know that eight nations of the world have official Thanksgiving Days? They are Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Korea, Liberia, Switzerland and the United States.

The first American Thanksgiving began long before 1776. The Thanksgiving holiday celebrated each November in the United States is known worldwide as an American custom, but its roots extend far back into human history.

According to research conducted by the Center for World Thanksgiving at Thanks-Giving Square, the first Americans observed rituals and ceremonies to express gratitude to a higher power for life itself. A Seneca Indian ritual, for example, states, "Our Creator ... Shall continue to dwell above the sky, and this is where those on earth will end their thanksgiving." Another quotation attributed to the American Indians before Columbus is, "The plant has its nourishment from the earth and its limbs go up this way, in praise of its Maker ... like the limbs of a tree." According to historical sources, the Pilgrims never held an autumnal Thanksgiving feast. The Pilgrims did have a feast in 1621 near Plymouth, Massachusetts, after their first harvest. This is the feast people often refer to as "The First Thanksgiving." This feast was never repeated, so it can't be called the start of a tradition, nor did the colonists or Pilgrims call it a Thanksgiving Feast. In fact, to these devoutly religious people, a day of thanksgiving was a day of prayer and fasting.

Nevertheless, the 1621 feast has become a model for the Thanksgiving celebration in the United States. More than likely, this first harvest feast was eaten outside, based on the fact that the colonists didn't have a building large enough to accommodate all the people who came. Native Americans definitely were among the invited guests, and it's possible, even probable, that turkey (roasted but not stuffed) and pumpkin in some form found their way to the table. The feast is described in a firsthand account presumably written by a leader of the colony, Edward Winslow, as it appears in Mourt's Relation:

"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. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it

be not always so plentiful as it was this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

From this we know that the feast went on for three days, included 90 "Indians," as Native Americans were called then, and had plentiful food. In addition to the venison provided by the Native Americans, there was enough wild fowl to supply the village for a week. The fowl included ducks, geese, turkeys and even swans.

New World with Many Cultural Influences: In addition to thanksgiving traditions brought to North America by settlers from many parts of the world, some authorities link the American thanksgiving with the ancient Jewish observance of Sukkot in the fall, which expresses thanks to God for the bounty of the earth. Indeed, all the major world religions—including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam—have rituals, observances and liturgies that express thanks and gratitude to a higher power for the gift of life and its wonders. Regardless of the origin of the American Thanksgiving holiday, the following brief timeline shows its development.

Timeline of American Thanksgiving Holiday

- 1541 During Coronado's expedition a Eucharistic thanksgiving, with the friendly Teya Indians present, occurred in Palo Duro Canyon in West Texas.
- 1621 Pilgrims and Native Americans enjoyed a harvest feast in Plymouth, Massachusetts. This feast may have become the model for today's American celebration.
- 1630 Settlers and colonists from many continents brought customs of days of prayer and thanksgiving, especially in New England, where the first Thanksgiving of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was observed on July 8, 1630.
- 1777 The first Thanksgiving of the new United States of America occurred in 1777 when General George Washington and his army, as instructed by the Continental Congress, stopped in bitter weather in the open fields on their way to Valley Forge to mark the occasion.
- 1789 Washington's first proclamation after his inauguration as the nation's first president in 1789 declared November 26, 1789, as a national day of "thanksgiving and prayer."
- 1800s The annual presidential thanksgiving proclamations ceased for 45 years in the early 1800s.
- 1863 President Abraham Lincoln resumed the tradition in 1863.
- November 26, 1941 President Roosevelt signed the bill establishing the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. Because two years out of every seven have five Thursdays in November, some states for the next 15 years celebrated on their own on the last Thursday. Since 1956, the fourth Thursday in November has been observed by every state.

Famous Thanksgiving Quotations:

George Washington in his first Presidential Proclamation: "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."—October 3, 1789

Samuel Adams, father of the American Revolution: "It is therefore recommended ... to set apart Thursday the eighteenth day of December next, for solemn thanksgiving and praise, that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor ..."—November 1, 1777 (adopted by the 13 states as the first official Thanksgiving Proclamation)

Abraham Lincoln, during the Civil War: "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown."—1863

Sir John Templeton: "How wonderful it would be if we could help our children and grandchildren to learn thanksgiving at an early age. Thanksgiving opens the doors. It changes a child's personality. A child is resentful, negative—or thankful. Thankful children want to give, they radiate happiness, and they draw people."

Albert Schweitzer: "To educate yourself for the feeling of gratitude means to take nothing for granted, but to always seek out and value the kind that will stand behind the action. Nothing that is done for you is a matter of course. Everything originates in a will for the good, which is directed at you. Train yourself never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude."

William Faulkner: "Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all."

Seneca Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy: "Our Creator shall continue to dwell above the sky, and that is where those on earth will end their thanksgiving."

Anne Frank: "I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains. Go outside into the fields, nature and the sun, go out and seek happiness in yourself and in God. Think of the beauty that again and again discharges itself within and without you and be happy."

Theodore Roosevelt: "Let us remember that, as much has been given us, much will be expected from us, and that true homage comes from the heart as well as from the lips, and shows itself in deeds."—1901

John Fitzgerald Kennedy: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

If you personally know me, you know that each holiday is very special to me. In fact my family sometimes says I go a little overboard, which I probably do. But ever since I was a young child in a poor family, my mom taught us that every holiday could be wonderful as long as you used your mind and heart. I hope that I will always have the pleasure of seeing and experiencing each holiday with my heart full of love and my mind full of gratitude and dreams for a better world and through the eyes of a child still in awe. I wish the same for each of you!