

# Thanksgiving was invented by a magazine editor in the mid-1800s

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TOP: A little boy and a little girl bring two large turkeys as a gift. This vintage postcard was mailed for Thanksgiving around 1900. BELOW: The first Thanksgiving, in 1621, is depicted by artist Jean Leon Gerome Ferris. Getty Images.

Today, the traditional Thanksgiving dinner includes many dishes. There weren't as many served at the first Thanksgiving.

The meal that is known as the first Thanksgiving was a harvest celebration. It was shared by the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Native Americans. They ate together at Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts in 1621. Letters from the time show that they ate wild birds, corn and grain. They even ate deer.

## Any Turducken?

It is hard to know what else they might have eaten. To do so, Kathleen Wall studies old cookbooks and what gardens were like then. She also looks at archaeological remains.

Turkey was not the centerpiece of the meal, as it is today, explains Wall. She suspects that people preferred goose or duck.



Small birds were often roasted over a fire. Larger birds were boiled. It is possible that the birds were stuffed, though probably not with bread. The Pilgrims instead stuffed birds with onions and herbs. The first Thanksgiving was a three-day celebration. This probably meant that birds were roasted the first day. Then they were thrown in a pot and boiled to make broth the next day. That broth could be thickened with grain to make a stew.

### **Please Pass The Eels**

The colonists and Native Americans probably also ate seafood. Eels, lobster, clams and mussels were some of the seafood that was easy to find.

The Native Americans that the pilgrims ate with were called the Wampanoag. They lived in the woodlands. Wall says that they had a very good diet. The forest provided different kinds of nuts. They also grew multicolored corn, beans, pumpkins and squashes.

### **No Pie**

This is not what the colonists would have eaten if they had stayed in England. In England, people often ate pie. Colonists did not have butter and wheat flour to make pie crusts. (That's right: No pumpkin pie!) Instead, they ate a lot of meat, says Wall.

Meat without potatoes, that is. Potatoes had not yet been brought to North America. White potatoes come from South America and sweet potatoes are from the Caribbean. They were first brought to North America 100 years later. Also, there would have been no cranberry sauce. It would be another 50 years before that was invented. Wall thinks that to wash it all down the English and Wampanoag drank water.

## **Colonial Nostalgia**

All this, naturally, begs a follow-up question. So how did the Thanksgiving menu become what it is today?

Thanksgiving as we know it today began in the mid-1800s. Around this time, an author referred to the harvest celebration in 1621 as the "first Thanksgiving." During this time period there was nostalgia for the colonial era. By the 1850s, most states and territories were celebrating Thanksgiving.

## **Sarah Josepha Hale Wrote The Book On Thanksgiving**

Sarah Josepha Hale was a leading voice in establishing Thanksgiving as an annual event. She was the editor of the popular women's magazine called Godey's Lady's Book. Hale also was famous for writing the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb." She started writing to presidents to make it a national holiday in 1827. She finally pitched her idea to President Lincoln as a way to unite the country. The country was in the middle of the Civil War. Lincoln listened to her. He made Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863.

Hale printed many Thanksgiving recipes in her magazine even before Thanksgiving was a national holiday. She also published a dozen cookbooks. This made women feel like celebrating Thanksgiving was something they wanted to do. Much of the Thanksgiving food that we think of today can be found in her cookbooks.

**Quiz**

- 1 Read the section "Any Turducken?" Which sentence BEST explains what happened with goose or duck leftovers?
- (A) They were mixed with onions and herbs.
  - (B) They were served on the second and third days.
  - (C) They were boiled and turned into thick stews.
  - (D) They were stuffed and roasted over a fire.
- 2 Read the section "Colonial Nostalgia." Which sentence from the section helps the reader to understand why it became popular to celebrate Thanksgiving?
- (A) Thanksgiving as we know it today began in the mid-1800s.
  - (B) Around this time, an author referred to the harvest celebration in 1621 as the "first Thanksgiving."
  - (C) During this time period there was nostalgia for the colonial era.
  - (D) By the 1850s, most states and territories were celebrating Thanksgiving.
- 3 Why does Kathleen Wall think that colonists did not have pie at Thanksgiving?
- (A) They did not have the correct ingredients.
  - (B) Pie was a favorite in England, not the colonies.
  - (C) They wanted more meat in their diet.
  - (D) Pie was too expensive for the colonists.
- 4 Which section of the article BEST explains why many of the foods people eat today at Thanksgiving would be missing from meals during colonial times?
- (A) "Any Turducken?"
  - (B) "No Pie"
  - (C) "Colonial Nostalgia"
  - (D) "Sarah Josepha Hale Wrote The Book On Thanksgiving"