

Thanksgiving Day

In the United States, the fourth Thursday in November is Thanksgiving Day. It is a national holi-day. On this day, North Americans give thanks for the blessings they have received during the year.

Although Thanksgiving did not become a national holiday until President Lincoln made it law in 1863, its origins go back to the early 1600s. At that time, members of a religious group called the Puritans were being persecuted for holding beliefs that differed from the established doctrine of the Church of England.

Finally, a small group of Puritans decided to leave England to seek religious freedom. They set sail for America in a ship called the Mayflower, arriving in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in December of 1620.

The Pilgrims, as they came to be known, were poorly trained and poorly equipped to cope with life in the wilderness. They suffered greatly during their first winter. Poor food, hard work, disease, and bitterly cold weather killed many of them.

In the spring of 1621, an Indian named Squanto walked into the Plymouth settlement and introduced himself in a friendly way. Later he brought the chief of his tribe, who gave gifts to the Pilgrims and offered them assistance. The Indians taught the Pilgrims how to hunt and fish and grow corn, pumpkins, and beans. Because of the Indian's help, the Pilgrims had a good harvest that year.

In the fall of 1621, Governor William Bradford called for a day of Thanksgiving to God. The Governor also decided to use this occasion to strengthen the bond of friendship between the Pilgrims and their Indian neighbors. So, he invited the Indian chief and his braves to share the Thanksgiving feast.

The Indians gladly accepted and sent five deer. The Pilgrim men went hunting and returned with turkey and other wild game. The women prepared delicious dishes of corn, cranberries, squash, and pumpkins. The first Thanksgiving was served and eaten out of doors. It lasted three days and was a great success.

Many of the traditions of the modern North American Thanksgiving come from that first Thanksgiving celebration more than 350 years ago. The turkey, dishes with squash, corn, and cranberries, and pumpkin pie are like those eaten long ago. Everyone looks forward to the dinner, and people often overeat on Thanksgiving.

University students have a break at Thanksgiving. Since it is a family holiday, many of them travel home to be with relatives. Even students who live too far away to go home, often have big meals of turkey and other traditional food with their friends. Thanksgiving is one of the most enjoyable North American holidays.